

## FLAMINGO LAKE

Denny, the new D C. in charge of building a road against the Mau Mau at Manake, finds that a bad reputation has preceded him. His staff lack confidence in him; the settlers watch eagerly for his first lapse; he gets a most mixed reception from the Stanhope family—Mrs Stanhope loathes him, Mr. Stanhope is lukewarm, Barbara Stanhope loves him. Denny goes ahead with the road project with trouble coming at him from all directions in one of the world's trouble spots.

*Books by*  
**JAMES DILLON WHITE**

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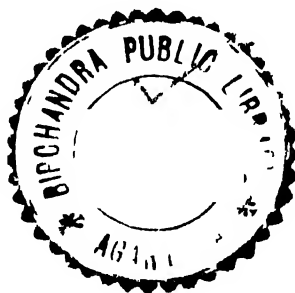
**HEARTBREAK CAMP  
THE EDGE OF THE FOREST  
THE SPOIETTA STORY  
A STRANGER IN TOWN  
THE QUIET RIVER  
THE *MAGGIE*  
FLAMINGO LAKE**

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*by*

JAMES DILLON WHITE



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For  
OLIVE, ANTHONY,  
and  
CHRISTOPHER DILLON WHITE

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS is a tale of Kenya in which, inevitably, the present troubles are mentioned. I want to stress that no reference to any actual incident is made or intended. All the people in this book are fictitious. There may be Stanhopes farming in the White Highlands or a District Commissioner named Denny, but if so I have not heard of them. The town, too, and the countryside have no reference to any particular district, except that they are set in the Rift Valley. This is wholly a work of fiction.

J.D.W.

## CHAPTER ONE

HE DROVE UP THE HILL IN A FLURRY OF RED DUST, and stopped as soon as he was clear of the forest. He looked round uneasily. On one side of the road the hill fell sharply away from a precipice edge; on the other there was a patch of scrub, a hundred yards wide, before the shadows began again beneath the acacia trees. Loosening the revolver at his thigh, he wondered whether he was being unnecessarily cautious. There was no sign of movement on the hillside: there was no sound other than the lowing of cattle somewhere down the hill and goat bells jangling in some near-by pen. When he climbed from the car, he could see a few conical thatches between the trees and a curl of woodsmoke against the green.

He looked again at the rising ground to his left. Apart from a few spiny euphorbia, reaching from the scrub like eccentrically sculptured hands, there was sparse cover for a dog, let alone a man. Ahead the track ran hard against a buttress of rock which rose sheer into the morning mist.

He relaxed and, tasting the acrid dust on his lips, felt automatically for his flask. Caution came to him as he took it from his pocket. He hesitated, calculated rapidly. There were four hours before he had to report to the Provincial Commissioner at Manake—four hours to turn the car and retrace his route into the valley, four hours to lose the whisky smell. He smiled sourly, knowing that in this gossip-ridden country his reputation would have arrived long before him: he could imagine it waiting like some shabby piece of luggage in the P.C.'s office.

Somewhere in the half-light before dawn he had lost the road, and now for the best part of an hour he had driven up this steep, winding track, avoiding the sudden pot-holes, twisting round spectacular bends, until it had become obvious that he could only arrive far up the mountain.

Would they hear about this too in Manake? *'The fellow was drunk when he arrived. Lost his way, so he said. Finished somewhere up the mountain!'*

As the whisky set the blood moving in his veins he knew that it didn't really matter. He saw Ali, his native boy, dozing on the back seat with a rifle held uncomfortably between his knees. With affection he recalled all the safaris they had made, from location to location, without even the protection of a tribal policeman: Ngeleda, Arop, Lamasia. Whatever the high-ups in Nairobi had to say about him, he had been a good District Commissioner. He knew that he had the gift of handling natives. Perhaps because he had genuine sympathy for their hardships, perhaps because he had human weaknesses they could understand, they accepted his rough justice without malice. He could join in a beer-drinking, finish up half-soused with a native girl beneath a tree, and still maintain discipline and respect at the next morning's tribunal.

He had an uneasy feeling that things were going to be different here. Perhaps that was why they had made the unexpected appointment. Did they think it would frighten him into resigning? But they hadn't finished with him yet. A few more years to go, say fifty safaris—if he lived as long. Something ran through the undergrowth; a hare or a startled buck. He took the revolver from his holster and waited, rather self-consciously. For this was Kikuyu country.

The skittering stopped. Only Ali's heavy breathing disturbed the stillness. He weighed the flask expertly—half empty. With his feet resting ankle-deep in dust, he sat on the running-board and waited for the full dawn.

It came as a line of yellow across the escarpment on the opposite side of the valley. At first he watched without understanding as a gigantic carpet of gold was laid magically across the sky. Then the light, flooding downwards, revealed the immense wall of rock, three thousand feet high, and stretching to right and left as far as the eye could see. Deep shadows marked the fissures and accentuated the sweeping

folds of the escarpment. Above, as he saw later, the mountain rose in thickly wooded slopes into the fertile region of Kipsigi country and the Mau. Without relaxing his attention from the scrubby area round the car, he watched the broad valley flooding with light.

The air was still and cold. After a while he rose and walked up and down, stamping his feet to drive out the numbness, and he saw as he turned on his beat that a corner of the town was just visible down the slope. There were some railway sidings, a cluster of hutments backed by bigger houses or shops—it was too far to see clearly—and the edge of the lake glittering white in the early sunlight. He was sure now that he was on the wrong track. He turned briskly towards the car, and it was as he raised his eyes, looking instinctively towards the hostile forest, that he saw the girl.

She appeared suddenly on a buttress of rock which rose precipitously a hundred feet above the road. There must have been a narrow ledge leading from the high plateau, for he could see her white blouse backed by the dark rock behind. For a moment she stood with hands clasped before her, looking out over the valley. Apparently she hadn't noticed the car drawn up beside the road, almost at her feet.

Then suddenly she stepped forward with feet overlapping the edge, like a diver preparing to plunge. One further step would bring her hurtling to the lower slopes, the trees, the thorny scrub, the red dust of the road.

He waited tensely, knowing exactly what she intended to do. Although she was so far above and difficult to see with the light coming from behind and with his own uncertain vision, her movements, divorced from sound, were accentuated like the actions in a mime. There was desperation there and resolve. One further step—oblivion.

Because he was a kindly man he found intense pity in the silent drama. He wanted to call out, but he knew that a sudden cry over the morning stillness might startle her into falling. Already she seemed to be swaying. Or was it his

imagination? He blinked and rubbed a hand across his eyes. Then, as she stepped back, reluctantly it seemed, to lean against the rock wall, he knew that he might save her yet.

He put his head in the car. "Ali!"

"Bwana?"

"I'm going up the hill." He pointed vaguely. "I shan't be long."

Still holding the revolver rather self-consciously in one hand, he started to climb the hill.

He made good progress at first. The low scrub, bushes of whistling thorn, presented no serious obstacle, and his body, numb with the morning cold, was ready for action. But before he had gone far, clearing the open space and scrambling a hundred yards or so up the steep incline beneath the acacia trees, he was in a poor way, with heart pounding madly and sweat running into his eyes. He wasn't fit. The realisation that he had lost for ever the pink athletic bloom of his college days struck him more forcibly than the half-forgotten sneers of his colleagues in Nairobi.

But, remembering the desperate girl, he plunged grimly on until it was physically impossible to go farther. He rested with one hand against the rough bark of a cedar tree, bending double, drawing the sharp air into his lungs. Fit! He could hardly see! At least, he thought, it would sweat some of the whisky out of him before he saw the Commissioner. Above the beating of his heart he could hear the forest noises, but not the chilling scream he dreaded and was always half expecting. Was she still seeking the courage to jump?

He started again, more slowly now, with toes digging into the loose earth, hands pressed above his knees. A king lizard, disturbed by his crashing feet, came from a thicket and slithered down the hill. A tawny shadow moved through the undergrowth; a buck or a leopard. The trees were thinning now, and as he stopped again he had an impression of the immense blue valley below. There couldn't be much farther to climb.

Half-blinded by fatigue he nearly passed the horse which had been tethered in the shadow of a cedar. He stood breathing heavily, wondering what to do. If he gave her too much warning of his presence, she might jump; if he came on her suddenly she might fall.

His doubts were settled as she came unexpectedly through a line of bushes and walked slowly across the clearing. She couldn't see him as he stood hidden in the shadows, and in those few moments he received an image that was to stay with him in detail for the rest of his life.

She was older than he had supposed, and yet the prim white blouse, buttoned at the neck, the riding habit, hair tied in an uncompromising bun, probably made her look older than she was. She was dowdy in the extreme, a caricature of how a young woman might have dressed at the turn of the century. But the impression that touched his senses was not of ridicule but of pity. As she walked with dragging steps across the short grass of the clearing, her lips puckered wretchedly with sobbing, tears ran unchecked down her face, and her arms, hanging loosely at her sides, showed an agony of despair. She didn't see him until he stepped out into the sunlight.

Then her expression changed. In spite of the sudden start of terror she acted more quickly than he would have thought possible. She stopped, snatched a gun from her pocket, and covered him hostilely.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

He said, "Don't worry about that. We're strangers. I only want to help."

"Who are you?"

He shrugged. "My name, for what it's worth, is Denny."

"The new District Commissioner."

"So you've heard?"

"Heard!" He saw from the suddenly pursed lips that she knew all about his reputation. She said, "What do you want with me?"

Fear had mastered her grief, but only temporarily, for he

noticed that even as she rubbed a handkerchief across her eyes, her lips were trembling with the effort of composure. Her pallid face, devoid of make-up, was painted grotesquely by tears mixing with the red dust of the road.

"I only want to help."

She began to cry again, quietly and hopelessly, with head bent, hands by her sides, so that he had to turn away in embarrassment. He walked under the trees where the horse was tethered. Overhead the spreading branches met without a break to form, with the dazzling sunlight above, a canopy of green filigree and gold. He was admiring the fine leatherwork of her saddle when she came up behind him. "I must go home."

He looked at her wretchedly determined profile and asked, "Do you live far from here?"

"Not so far."

"I'd come with you, only my car is down on the road."

"I'll be all right." She untied the halter rope and started to lead the horse into the clearing. She said, "I only pray that you will forget me."

"Don't worry about that," he said with concern, "I'd like to see you home safely. I'm a stranger in this territory. From what I'd heard it's never safe for a European to be out alone."

"It's not." The furtive glance towards the row of thorn bushes betrayed her fear. "I've never dared to come like this before."

He knew what she was thinking. This morning was different because she hadn't expected to come back. He walked beside her, wanting to give some comfort, but not knowing in his rough half-native mind how to set about it. He asked, "What in heaven's name made you come out here this morning?"

She looked straight ahead. "I can't tell you."

"But—what happened? How did you get like this?"

"I can't tell you. I was upset. I suppose . . . being out here alone . . . the quiet mountain. I had time to think "



"Well, I'm glad you came to your senses. You certainly gave me a fright."

"A fright?"

"Well—standing there on the edge—ready to jump."

She looked at him in terror. "You don't really think I would have done that—the unforgivable sin? I may be a poor Christian . . ." He saw that, having failed through common sense or, more likely, through lack of courage, she was anxious to believe that the intention had never been there.

He said, "At least you were upset. There must have been something to bring you to this."

"If I was upset it's no concern of yours. You've no right to ask."

"Was it because of the emergency—the Mau Mau?"

She hesitated, and he knew when she agreed too readily that she was lying. "Yes—yes. That's it."

"Has there been much trouble round here?"

"Oh, yes. At least . . . there have been killings, but, more than that, it's the constant threat."

"How about neighbours?"

"There is no one within two miles."

"Any system of defence?"

She said wearily, "There's a wire fence even I could get through, and an alarm bell."

"Any patrols?"

"Oh yes. There's the Police Reserve and the Home Guard. Daddy—my father—is the officer in charge."

"Then you have that to be thankful for."

"Yes, I suppose so. Only, the headquarters are in the town, Manake. If we're attacked we can phone for help—if the wire hasn't been cut. Do you know how long it takes a patrol to get up here?"

"How long?"

"Two hours. Sometimes longer. The only road up the escarpment is the one you were on."

He said, "There must be some better arrangement. A

police post up here or . . .” He went on, “Don’t worry too much about this. As D.C. I’ll have to see what can be done.”

She said, “There’s only one solution.”

“What’s that?”

“Another road.”

“Yes—I’ll have to see . . .” He saw that she was watching him curiously, and again he had the impression that although she might be concerned with the Mau Mau threat it wasn’t this which had brought her to the brink of suicide. He said, “Perhaps I could call on you—have a word with your father.”

She started away, looking frightened and angry. “No, no. You mustn’t think of it. You mustn’t think of seeing me again. I ask you to forget me.”

He was taken aback by her vehemence. “All right. There’s no need to get excited.”

“I’m not excited. I’m only asking you to leave me alone.” She seemed so distraught that she hardly knew what she was doing. When the horse sneezed at her side she leapt aside, catching her skirt in the thorn bushes. He said, “Don’t get me wrong. There must be something pretty big to get you in a state like this. I’m only trying to help.”

“You can help by leaving me alone.”

“If that’s what you want.”

She accused, “I know exactly what you want. . . . Find out my name and you can tell this as an amusing little anecdote to your drinking friends at Manake.”

He stopped dead as though she had slapped his face. “Well, I’ll be . . .” He controlled the earthy language that came naturally to his lips. “If that’s what you’re thinking, you can find your own way. I didn’t expect any thanks for sweating my guts out trying to reach you in time: at least you needn’t be so bloody offensive.”

She drew into herself, prim and opinionated, “How dare you use that language to me.”

“Oh, go to hell!” He turned on his heel and walked angrily back to the clearing.

Hé was back in the shadow of the trees before he heard her cry, "One moment." He waited grudgingly and looked back, "Well?"

She stood in the thorn scrub, looking small and unkempt against the powerful, well-groomed horse. She asked in a ridiculously humble voice, "Please don't leave me. There is still half a mile of forest. . . . Sometimes . . . ambushes. . . ." She began to cry again. "I'm so afraid."

In a moment he forgot his anger. As he came back across the grass she was sobbing in the pitiful manner he had seen before. Something stirred inside him—sympathy or compassion. Her wretchedness, even her unattractiveness, were more important to him than beauty. He took her arm and led her up the rising hill. "There's nothing for it," he said, "I'll have to see you home."

They walked silently, side by side, as day broke magically on the mountain-side. The sun, clearing the higher peaks, was chasing the shadows farther and farther downwards, until Denny and the girl were walking ankle-deep in sparkling dew. The thorn bushes gave way to thickets of sweet-smelling leleshwa and the lower fringes of the bamboo forests. In a miniature valley a few thatched roofs of native huts pointed above the bushes, and as they passed they heard the rattling of ankle bells as children opened the gates of thorn fences to let out the cattle and goats. There were a few roughly-tilled shambas on the terraced hill. A mountain buck which had been feeding on the maize lunged quickly over the rocks.

The girl clutched Denny's arm as they saw the unmistakable movement of a black head beside the path. He pushed her behind him, and drew his revolver, but he could feel no fear. For so many years he had moved among natives—hunted with them, slept with them; hanged them when necessary. Despite his knowledge of events he couldn't appreciate the singular menace of the Kikuyu, and it came as no surprise to see that the black head belonged to an old man performing his motions in the tall grass. The old man,

a Kamasia, was in no way abashed. Without moving his position, he greeted:

"Jambo, bwana!"

"Jambo."

"What news?"

"Good news."

As Denny turned towards the girl he saw that she was blushing with embarrassment. What was her background, he wondered, that she should be so prim? Some of the older people he had met, the pioneers, still lived their patriarchal lives despite the ugly scuffle of events, but their children somehow managed, by cocktail parties and occasional visits to the cinema, week-end trips to Nairobi, to keep pace with the breathless emancipation. The girl whose mother had ridden the farm with a stock whip and a revolver against the saddle drove down the laterite roads in a Ford V-8 with a pistol next to her powder-compact. But this girl by his side . . .

He asked brusquely, "What's your name?"

She hesitated and blushed again. "Barbara Stanhope. You've probably heard . . ."

"I've heard nothing. I told you before, I've just come to the district." He was still upset by her earlier remark.

She seemed to realise this, for now, instead of giving information reluctantly, she seemed eager to pour it out. "Ours is the largest farm in these parts—or was until we lost most of Kikuyu labour."

"What do you grow?"

"Pyrethrum mostly. There's some maize, and of course all our own vegetables."

"And you help to run it?"

"Oh yes. Mother believes—we believe that God gave us healthy bodies to be used to some purpose. There are no idle hands on our farm."

Her smug voice irritated him like an unhappy echo from the past: missionaries' wives, temperance workers.

He said, "It sounds pretty joyless to me."

She took him seriously. "Oh no. Not really. She gives us all our jobs, there's no time to be unhappy."

The horse whinnied suddenly and reared, almost pulling Denny from the ground, as a snake slid hurriedly across the path.

Denny said, "You only speak of your mother. Is your father away?"

She answered without embarrassment, "No, Daddy's here, all right, only it's mother who manages the farm."

"I see."

They came to the end of the thickets and paused where the open grass-covered hill began. Farther up the mountain a rambling colonial-style farmhouse showed clearly in black and white against the waving greenery of the bamboo forest beyond. Neat shambas, apparently empty of workers, although it was now well past dawn, fitted neatly into the jigsaw pattern of the rising farmland. Over a false crest a few columns of smoke rose from the hutments of the Kipsigi squatters.

The girl said, "I must go. That's my home, across by the forest."

"You'll be all right now." He looked at her untidy hair, the dust-streaked face, and wondered why he was reluctant to let her go. Was it because his interest had been aroused—by the hint of a story? He couldn't understand her at all. It would have been interesting to know why she had been so desperate.

"I must go." She looked at him shyly, and added, "I want to thank you. You've been very kind."

Turning to retrace his steps he saw the magnificent panorama of valley and forest and distant escarpment rolling in purple waves to the sharp blue of the horizon. From her house it must appear even finer. Clearly visible now on the floor of the valley were the town of Manake and the white shores of Flamingo Lake.

He took a few awkward steps along the path and then came slowly back. Holding the horse's bridle, so that his

hand was touching hers, he said, "Back there, where I first found you . . . I was only speaking the truth when I said I wanted to help. You don't understand. . . ."

She said unexpectedly, "I do now. I know I was wrong. I want to apologise."

"That's nothing. What I mean is . . ." Driven by goodwill he stumbled on through the maze of unaccustomed words. "When there are bad times . . . things go wrong . . . it's hard to keep a sense of perspective. Think to yourself. Well, there are others far worse off than me. They keep going, waiting for the luck to change—it's really just a matter of luck, or pluck—a bit of both, I dare say. And another thing, can you really be sure that when the luck does change you won't look back on this—with regret, but damned glad, all the same, that you had the sense to ride out the bad times?" He paused, deep in embarrassment, and turned away. "Well, I'll be going."

He was surprised by the change in her voice, as she said, "Now I am really ashamed. When you told me your name I thought . . ." She hesitated. "But I was completely wrong. You're really a good man."

## CHAPTER TWO

THE PROVINCIAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE was a new stone building, next to the police barracks. The dazzling whiteness of its walls, the sharply cut steps, gave it an incongruous air of elegance against its shabby neighbours—the rambling, single-storeyed barracks, Indian shops, the corrugated iron shed of a garage. On the pavement at the foot of the steps, a native policeman walked smartly backwards and forwards along his narrow beat: six paces from the doorway, about turn, twelve paces back to the limit of the wire. His khaki shorts and shirt, a helmet with the polished badge, were worn with pride, and he swung his truncheon to a position of salute as Denny's car pulled up in the roadway.

Denny looked sourly at this temple of officialdom. There were curtains in the windows, he noticed, and a bowl of flowers beside a typewriter. Even as he watched, a trim young secretary, a white girl, passed across the open doorway and up a flight of stairs. He felt dirty and unwashed, and the dust of the road lay thick in the folds of his bush shirt. To hell with it! For years he had been in the wilderness, doing a man's job—something these town wallahs could never understand. He heaved himself from the car and walked stiffly towards the gap in the barbed wire. He hadn't had a drink in four hours.

The Commissioner was waiting to receive him, a big, bluff, kindly man whom Denny, despite his natural prejudice, liked and trusted at once. He rose from his chair as Denny came suspiciously through the doorway, and offered a firm, nothing-held-back handshake. "I don't have to tell you I'm glad to see you." He rang a bell and waited for his native orderly. "What will you have?"

Denny looked at him warily, suspecting a test, but the Commissioner said, "I'm having a whisky. You could do with one too after that journey."

"I'd like a whisky."

They drank in silence, like two opponents weighing the odds, with the table between them as a frontier. Strengthened by the drink, Denny looked critically round the large room: the whitewashed walls, ceiling fans, the inner window opening on to a courtyard. From this cool sanctuary orders would be sent to his own remote headquarters; officials would gather here, his weakness would be discussed by men who had never been tired enough or desperate enough to have known the need for a drink.

"I'm sorry," the Commissioner was saying, "that you should have to take on such a damned unpleasant job." He was stuffing tobacco into his pipe, and as he lit it he watched Denny through the smoke. "Trouble is we must have an experienced man. That, and the danger, which made us want someone without a family."

"Is that why I was chosen?"

"Partly. There are other aspects, though, which I'll explain." He smiled. "There's no harm in you knowing that I wanted you. I'd heard all about you from Matheson, of course. You were with him on the coast? He spoke very highly of you."

"And here—in Mangayo?"

The Commissioner puffed away at his pipe. "I know that your territory was as free from crime as any. The tribes were happy and co-operative. That's all I ask to know about any D.C."

Denny sat quietly, almost tensely, on his chair, watching for the least warning of insincerity, but the Commissioner's expression was patently honest. Denny asked, "What happened to Baker?"

"He was killed. I thought you knew."

"I mean, how did it happen?"

"Well—he took a risk. Nine times out of ten he'd have been all right."

"What sort of risk?"

The Commissioner took the pipe from his mouth and held



it on his lap. "There's a part of the reserve in your territory—you know that? Well, there had been a pretty careful check. Poor Baker found the numbers were going down; he was afraid they were drifting back to the highlands, so he went alone, checking up on the farms, especially those which had employed 'Kuke' squatters. He was returning from one of those—it was the Stanhopes' farm up on High Ridge—when he was ambushed and killed."

Stanhope? The name buzzed irritatingly through his brain like an insect in a dimly-lit bedroom. He couldn't place it exactly, although he knew that there was a corresponding cell in his memory—or for something like it. Stanhope, Manake, Kamasia. He asked, "Did you say Stanhope?"

"Yes. Do you know them?"

"I was just thinking . . . Where is High Ridge?"

"It's a plateau to the east of town. You can see . . ." He bent his head to the desk as he looked out of the window. "You can almost see it from here. There's the escarpment." He pointed to the wall of rock, rising like the escarpment on the other side of the valley, in a straight, almost vertical line, for three thousand feet. "On the top there's a sloping patch of scrub, with a few villages, some squatters—Kikuyu mostly and a few Kamasia. After that it's open country, good arable land, before the forest begins."

"And it was on that road they got Baker?"

The Commissioner moved in his chair. "It's a terrible road, hardly safe even in the dry weather. Half-way down there's a clearing beneath a cliff—the last place you'd think of for an ambush. He stopped his car."

Remembering his casual stop on that very spot in the dangerous half-light of dawn, the comforting swig of whisky, feet in the dust, Denny had the first pricklings of fear. He accepted, for the first time, that these Kikuyu were something different from the black faces creased in childish delight, the grinning white teeth he had known in his old territory of Mangayo. Through the years he had

grown to love the natives. As a cadet he had treated them with condescension, as Assistant D.C. with understanding; only when he had been given full charge of his district had he found them as human beings, drinking companions, lovers. He had drifted to their way of life as surely as he had renounced the white tabus which in the wilderness he found pedagogic and absurd. Despite his Presbyterian parents and the grim kirk of his childhood—or perhaps because of them—he was nearer a black than a white man. But the Kikuyu——!

He asked, "Why did he stop the car?"

The Commissioner shrugged. "We'll never know. Something he'd forgotten—the car wasn't running well—the brakes possibly!"

"Couldn't you check up?"

"They got him out—or perhaps he was out already. They—hacked him about and sent the car over the cliff."

Denny tilted the empty glass in his hand; not even a drain of whisky. "Not a pleasant way to die."

The Commissioner explained, almost apologetically, "They're experts, you see."

"Experts?"

"With the panga or the simi. They cut where they mean to cut—like a mad butcher." The Commissioner pushed a box of cigarettes across the table. "Sorry—you're not smoking."

No second drink, Denny noticed. He put his glass reluctantly on the table and took a cigarette. His thoughts wandered vaguely round the room: the filing cabinet with one drawer marked 'Secret'—the file on J. Denny, D.C. Mangayo, he guessed, or a convenient hiding place for a gin bottle; a picture of the Queen, Coronation year; crossed hunting spears and a shield of rhino leather. What were those last words? 'Like a mad butcher'. He tried to think why they had been used. A warning: 'If you're not good you'll have the bogey man—chop, chop, chop—a mad butcher.' His judgment was distorted by suspicion

as much as by drink, so that he was looking for some sly, hidden meaning in everything the Commissioner said.

"I'm glad you got on well with Matheson. He's one of my oldest friends. We had a long spell together in India—he may have told you."

"He was a fine D.C.," Denny said sincerely, dropping his guard for a moment.

"He's retired now, of course. A farm in Wiltshire. The country gentleman."

"Yes."

"You saw him before he went?"

"Yes." Denny withdrew into himself as he remembered the humiliation of that meeting. He wouldn't have been in the officers' club, he wouldn't have been in Nairobi at all, if it hadn't been necessary to go to Headquarters about some bridging material. His brief visit, the unpleasantness at the hotel—the men moving away from the bar as he approached, the women voicing their disapproval, the girls tittering. White girls! Albinos! The brief unhappy excursion into civilised life had already convinced him that it would be a mistake ever to return when he had stumbled accidentally into Matheson, his old chief. Although Denny had been too far gone to care overmuch, the sudden shock had cleared his perception, so that he was enchanted again by Matheson's deep, cool friendliness. In many ways he was very like this man, the Provincial Commissioner.

"He asked me to keep an eye on you," the P.C. was saying. "Said you once saved his life."

So that was it! The year of drought; famine across the whole territory; a baraza beneath the giant thorn tree which had been the tribal meeting place for generations before the white men came. Sullen complaints, a plea for patience. Then the moran,\* crazed by hunger, running berserk towards the group under the tree—the headmen, the cadet Denny, D. C. Matheson. Now the unthinking stand which had been marked as bravery all those years ago was bearing

\* Warrior or young man.

this reward: "Look after Denny if you can. He's in a bad way."

"Is that why I'm here?" Denny asked. "So that you can keep an eye on me?"

From the Commissioner's deprecating gesture he knew that he had found the truth, but the Commissioner said, "Please don't misunderstand me. I told you before. I asked for you because I want you." He turned away with relief as a telephone bell rang. "Excuse me."

Through the window Denny could see a squad of police drilling on the parade ground. The R.S.M. in charge, a Somali, was yapping orders like a terrier: "Mark time—Halt. One-two. About turn." The native policemen shuffled amiably in the sunshine.

"He's here with me now," the Commissioner was saying. "Do you want to speak to him?" He held out the receiver with his hand over the mouthpiece. "It's Lucien, your Assistant—just wanting to know if you'd arrived."

Denny took the receiver unwillingly and was immediately assailed by a voice of unbearable cheerfulness and efficiency. "Hallo, sir. Welcome to Manake. So sorry the P.C. wouldn't let me come in to meet you. I'll send the truck in to pick you up. It'll be with you inside the hour."

"I've brought my own car," Denny replied.

"I'll send some orderlies, then, to help you with your luggage."

"I've got my own boy."

"Good-oh! We can do with another trained servant out here. Well, I'll get everything ready at this end, sir—carpet down, flag flying."

"Just get me a bath," said Denny sourly, and rang off.

The Commissioner was watching him curiously. "A good man, Lucien—ambitious."

Denny said, "I wonder you didn't give him the job."

"Well, the way I figure it, there's a need for both of you," the Commissioner said. He was having trouble with his

pipe. He probed at it with a cleaner as he spoke. "I said that there was a special reason for wanting you—quite apart from your old chief's recommendation. Well—" He stood up and went across to the big wall map. "If you take a look at this. . . ."

Denny pushed himself unwillingly from the comfort of his chair. He felt sleepy and unwell. How could he get at his pocket flask without being seen? The latrine possibly. "Is this my district?"

"Here—everything inside the green line." For the first time Denny noticed that the Commissioner had a finger missing from his right hand, the forefinger. Probably from years of practice he managed to hide it well, the thumb and middle finger pinched together taking the place of the index. "Your headquarters are here, of course," the Commissioner was saying, "at Kanye. There's a good road up to there, but nothing much beyond."

"Plenty of safaris, then, to cover the whole area?"

"Yes, although there's no need for you to do too much in that line. Baker used to leave most of the donkey work to Lucien, and there's a cadet named Palethorpe. Between them they can keep an eye on the whole district."

"What am I supposed to do?"

The Commissioner said, "Well, there are other things. . . . I'll tell you." He hesitated. "And it's not a bad thing, I think, for the D.C. to hold himself a bit aloof. You know?—making it all the more effective when you do go."

Denny waited angrily, realising that the Commissioner was treading delicately round a warning. If he hadn't needed a drink so badly he would have appreciated the diplomacy; now he wanted to flare into action. "I've never worked that way," he said. "I don't believe in it. The district is mine. I'm responsible for everything. No conscientious D.C. thinks his work is done as soon as he has collected the taxes and seen the prisoners in jail. He's got to know everything that goes on in his district—everything: stock thefts, tribal feuds, land preservation, even family

quarrels. You don't learn all that by sitting on your backside, waiting for your juniors to report."

"Perhaps you're right," the Commissioner said mildly. "It was only a suggestion."

"I'll tell you what . . ." Denny began, and he stopped, as curiosity hovered over a new red line on the map. If he didn't ask about it now, he would forget. "What's this?"

The Commissioner lit his pipe again and hedged behind the wall of smoke. "Now, that is the main reason for wanting you here. I want your co-operation."

"It looks like a road."

"It is a road."

Denny studied it expertly. From the spacing and shape of the contours he could visualise the whole hillside, the body of the escarpment, gutted here by a ravine, the steep scrub land above, the broad plateau of the highlands with sinister fingers clutching downwards from the bamboo forests where the Mau Mau hid. He shook his head regretfully. "That'll be a hell of a job."

The Commissioner looked at him. "Do you think you could do it?"

"Do I think that *I* could do it?" Denny smiled in a way that Matheson would have recognised, the smile of a new, eager cadet. "I wouldn't mind having a try."

"It will be a real engineering feat if you can manage it—the gradients, the rock face of the escarpment, the river coming down here. I don't have to tell you the difficulties." In his relief, the Commissioner was almost incoherent. "I know that ordinarily road-making isn't a senior's job."

"This isn't an ordinary road," Denny replied absently. With arms folded across his chest he was studying the detail of the map. He asked, "What about funds?"

"As much as you like—within reason. The Government has given us full backing. There's bridging equipment here, and explosive—have to go careful with that, by the way. Guard it with your life."

"Because of the Mau Mau?"



The Commissioner said frankly, "I'd be wrong if I didn't point out the dangers. The difficulties you can work out for yourself, but——" He hesitated. "You're new to this territory, new to the Mau Mau threat. It's all very well to have read about it, but now—you're up against the real thing." He traced his finger down the patches of dark green. "Higher up you'll be working your way through forests; there are rocks, hidden valleys, cover all the way. You'll be on safari for weeks on end and in danger all the time."

Denny looked at him steadily. He realised now why he was being asked to do this. It was a Herculean test which would make or break him. It was a chance of redemption offered by two men who thought he needed saving. He couldn't think clearly in the whisky haze. Resentment struggled against interest for the job.

"You realise why it's necessary?" the Commissioner was saying. "The highlands here, above the escarpment, are farmed almost exclusively by Europeans. Up there they are the natural target for Mau Mau. We must have some way of getting to them quickly; even our patrols have to go right down here and up this track where Baker was killed, to the Stanhope farm—twenty-five miles of hellish tracks to cover four, five miles as the crow flies."

Denny squinted closely at the map. He asked, "Which is the Stanhope farm?"

"It's here—by the edge of the forest."

Denny saw that the red line of the new road passed close to the farm, probably through their land, before curving off to the other farmsteads along the plateau. He asked, "When do I start?"

## CHAPTER THREE

HE WAS COMFORTABLY DRUNK by the time they left the river track and started on the long climb to Kanye. The station was clearly visible on the hillside: the D.C.'s bungalow at the summit of a rise and then, downwards through the social strata, another, smaller bungalow, the low rambling hospital, Government offices and sheds round a barrack square, the prison, and then a few coffee-coloured houses of the native staff, Indian traders, until in the stony wasteland at the foot of the hill the few Indian shops touched at the hem of the native quarter. Lurching from side to side, backwards and forwards, as Ali crashed up the tortuous track, he was still able to watch and appreciate the beauty of the remote hill station. It was not unlike his old headquarters at Mangayo and in fact, lulled by the whisky fumes, he found himself drifting into forgetfulness, so that he looked forward to Habbasiyah's bright dress and a smile splitting her black face.

But it was not Habbasiyah who greeted him, as the car stopped with a jerk. There was a gate in a low hedge of flowering thorn, a houseboy standing to attention; and the white man.

Denny, who had fallen into a doze, gathered his wandering senses as a bright fake smile loomed against the door.

"Beautifully timed, sir. You're here for tiffin."

As the door opened Denny climbed slowly and carefully out on to the red dust of the road. He looked round, threw back his shoulders, and breathed deeply of the hot cedar-spiced air. He stamped his feet and, glancing sideways, caught the other man's unguarded expression of expectancy—as though the new D.C. might fall into the road, and rather hoping for it.

"I've forgotten your name."

"Lucien, sir. Christopher Lucien."



Denny took his limp hand and looked down past some podocarpus trees to the parade ground, where a native policeman with a mess-tin was staring vacantly up towards the car, as he shook some scraps to a few frantic hens.

"Is this all the station?"

"Yes, sir. You can see it all from here—except the native quarters. You came through that on your way up."

"I was asleep." Denny stared a challenge and knew as soon as he saw the quick overworked smile that he could manage Lucien. Ambitious, the P.C. had said: a man to be watched, he thought.

He said, "I'd like to have a look round."

"Well, tiffin is ready, sir, and I thought . . ."

"Yes?"

"You've had a tiring journey. Perhaps you'd like a rest." And then, a bubble of malice bursting through the surface: "You don't look at all well."

"I'm perfectly well." It was true. The only time you could question his ability was when he had gone, through force of circumstance, for an hour or two without a drink. Then, with the senses blunted, nerves taut, he lost both his judgment and his humour. Sober he was a sick man, drunk he was first-class. Now, because he had caught Lucien's unguarded expression, he wanted to make an immediate inspection, despite the midday sun; he wanted to establish his ability at once to a man he felt, instinctively, was waiting, perhaps hoping, for his downfall.

"Of course, sir, if that's what you want." Lucien's expression was so crestfallen as he turned to the houseboy, who was still standing at attention by the gate, that Denny relented. After all, if he had to be master, it wasn't necessary to start now, within a few minutes of arrival. Let the man have his chance. With proper handling they might still rub along amicably enough.

He said, "Don't worry. We'll have tiffin first as it's ready. Afterwards we'll go round together."

There were two adjacent bungalows, the larger one, which

they were now entering, belonging to the D.C. and his staff, the other to his Assistant and the station cadet.

"We mess in here, sir," Lucien was saying, "at least, that was the arrangement under the Chief." He coloured slightly. "I mean Baker, of course."

Denny looked appreciatively round the neat dining-room: polished floors, a few Indian carpets, two ceiling fans drawing an eddy of cool air through the open windows. Outside, the hill rose steeply over an immaculate lawn to the short grass and flowering shrubs beneath the wide-spreading, sweet-smelling cedars. Only a triple fence of dannert wire broke the illusion of peace.

"Your bedroom's through there, sir, and there's the bath-room. I expect you'd like a wash."

"Thanks."

As he opened the door a rat scuttled on to the window-sill and eyed him arrogantly for a few seconds before dropping outside. Sluicing the warm tangy water over his face and neck, Denny felt unexpectedly at peace. His interview with the P.C. had been reassuring. There was a job here to do. The road he was already accepting as a challenge. From his experience and success with roads in other districts, they had been forced to come to him, the outcast, to tear this route to safety from the formidable hills. Well, he would show them.

He was still rubbing the towel across his face as he came back into the dining-room. Lucien, who was looking through the open window, turned quickly and summoned up a smile.

Denny said, "I'm sorry in a way they've given me this job. I mean—you were the obvious choice. Only thing is—I dare say the P.C. told you—there's something more here now, more than Baker had to cope with."

"You mean the road?"

"Yes." He rubbed the towel over his forearms.

A clean tablecloth, he noticed, and on the sideboard bottles of whisky and gin, both untouched, and copies of

*Esquire*, propped up to show the improbably developed girls. He suspected that Lucien was not interested in drink or particularly in girls, and that the sideboard array had been put there for his benefit. He said, "In a way, I suppose, this should be an ideal arrangement, although I dare say you don't see it like that. I mean, the road is going to be my province. Obviously it's going to take most of my time and energy. While I'm away, you'll have to look after things this end. You will be, in effect, D.C."

"Except in name."

"That's right." He looked sharply at his assistant, but he couldn't see past the wary eyes. He said, "All the experience you'll be getting must count for something when the next vacancy occurs. You know as well as I do the turnover of D.C.s. Who'd have thought a few weeks ago that Baker would go out like that? If you do a good job here, you'll be promoted, maybe sooner than you think."

"Thank you, sir. It's good of you to say this." For a moment Lucien seemed to be genuinely grateful, then, with a gesture of false bonhomie, he waved at the sideboard. "Will you have a drink, sir, before tiffin?"

"Thanks." Denny followed him with studied casualness to the focal centre of the room, the high-necked, fresh-corked, amber-filled bottle of whisky.

"You're lucky, sir. A new bottle. Only came up yesterday from Mohammed's store." Lucien poured in a generous peg and then, deliberately, doubled it.

"Who is Mohammed?"

"Our local trader, sir. You'll have to meet him. He's a big noise round here."

"Do you allow natives to sell spirits?"

"Not generally, of course. Only with Mohammed it's different—at least, that's been the official view."

"How different?"

"Well, sir, in the first place he's not a native—or an Indian. He's Syrian—practically a white man. Then again he's been here for years—here and Banare. There's hardly

a worth-while business in the whole district that he hasn't got an interest in—generally a controlling interest.”

“He could be dangerous.”

“Or helpful. I'm quite sure, sir, that you'll be able to handle him.”

As Denny raised the glass to his lips he caught Lucien's eyes and he knew that the extra measure of whisky had been given to him with a purpose. Contemptuously he threw back his head and tilted the glass against his teeth.

“Another one, sir?”

“No, thanks.” He sat heavily in a chair at the head of the table—Baker's chair—and tried to concentrate on the meal. For a time he couldn't see properly, and words came like the clues of a crossword puzzle in some highbrow weekly. he had to untangle their meaning. As if realising this, Lucien kept up a steady barrage of questions, short, staccato questions demanding answers. Concentrating doggedly on defence, Denny had neither the time nor inclination to eat, but as he waved away one untouched plate after another he felt a growing resentment towards his assistant. The bastard! The smug, clever bastard!

“Fruit, sir?”

“What? Oh yes.” He took a small bunch of grapes and, eating them slowly, he felt the muzziness passing. By turning his head towards the window he could get the full benefit of the ceiling fan. Lines sharpened in perspective, his fingers peeling the grapes were steady, Lucien's face was clear in its mask of artificial respect and good-humour.

Denny said, because it was the first coherent thought that entered his mind, “Do you know a girl called Stanhope?”

“Calamity Jane?”

“I don't know. Is that what you call her?”

“If it's the same woman. Daughter of the Stanhopes up on High Ridge. Everyone calls her that. I don't even know her real name.”

“It's Barbara—Barbara Stanhope.”

Lucien stared at him curiously. "Do you know them, sir? They're not friends of yours?"

Denny asked, "Why do you call her 'Calamity Jane'?"

"Well, it's plain enough when you've met her. She's like her mother—worse in a way—always prophesying hell-fire for us miserable sinners."

"You mean she's religious?" Of course. It's all tied up. Remembering her prim dowdiness, her terror when he mentioned the intended jump to death (the hypocrisy had been necessary, even to herself), he knew that she would fit easily into the hated world of his youth. In the procession—three times every Sabbath—from his cold, comfortless home to the kirk she would not have seemed out of place or eccentric. Calamity Jane: he could imagine how apt the name was. And yet, although she came as an echo of that consciously-forgotten past, he found that he thought of her with pity rather than anger. Calamity Jane!

He asked, "What kind of people are they?"

Lucien grinned maliciously. "There's the mother—a terrible woman. One of the real pioneers, you know. Runs the farm, dominates the whole household—religious as hell."

"What about the father?"

"Just what you'd expect with a woman like that."

"How do you mean?"

Lucien shrugged. "He was a pioneer, too—in a small way—scratching a living with a few cattle, some pyrethrum. The story goes that he had a legacy—nothing much—two, three hundred pounds. She's a missionary's daughter. Her father died—or was killed, I believe. She heard about Stanhope's legacy and married him for it."

"How long ago was all this?"

"Thirty, forty years."

He peeled the last of the grapes. "Is it true?"

"Frankly, sir, I don't know. It *sounds* true, knowing him and the way she keeps him at heel. But . . ." His voice trailed off, leaving unspoken what they both knew and

understood, the gossip, the malice, that was endemic amongst the European minority, living like demi-gods, six thousand feet towards the clouds.

Denny asked, "Is there only the one child?"

"There's a boy, Ian—much younger than his sister."

"How old would that be?"

Lucien gave him that quizzical look again. "Who do you mean, sir—the girl?"

"Both."

"Well, she, I suppose, must be thirty—thirty or thereabouts. Ian is eighteen or nineteen. They sent him home to Cambridge only last year."

"So they're well off?"

"They're not rich, I imagine, but they've a good farm—or it was until we put most of the 'Kuke' squatters into the reserve. I haven't been up there for some time. In any case, Mrs. Stanhope would have found the money somehow."

Denny looked at him inquiringly, waiting for the extra tit-bit of gossip which he knew was being kept until last, as a savoury. He didn't have to wait long.

"The fact is," Lucien said with a show of malice that seemed to run as an undercurrent through all his conversation, "Ian is his mother's one weakness."

"How do you mean?"

"Well——" Lucien made an unconvincing gesture of deprecation. "It's probably only rumour—like so much of the scandal you hear."

"Yes."

"But they say—I've heard it said—that—well—Ian is *her* son all right but not his."

"What about the girl?" He was irritated to find how his thoughts kept returning to the pitiful figure he had seen a few hours before, the dragging steps, unchecked sobs, as she crept unwillingly across the sunlit clearing, back into the cruel, uncaring world. He asked again, "What about the girl?"

Lucien said, "There's no doubt about her. She's Stan-

hope's' daughter, all right. You've only to see them together."

"You mean, he's religious?"

"No, not that exactly, although his wife keeps him up to scratch in that respect." Lucien was cutting an apple. He paused, with the knife in his hand, as he waited for the right words. "It's just that they're not unlike to look at, although he's a big man and she, the girl, isn't particularly big——"

"I know. I've seen her."

"Yes?" Now Lucien was genuinely surprised. Denny could see the questions flickering behind the eyes, but he met them all with a blank stare. "How else are they alike?" He had to repeat the question before he could break through Lucien's curiosity. "How else are they alike?"

"Yes—well—I suppose it's really the mother. They're both so subservient to her. They're both—somehow—helpless."

"I know." He found himself wondering again what could have brought the girl to the brink of suicide. He was intrigued by the mystery, intrigued and irritated. For years he had deliberately turned his back on the white settlers, the people he could neither like nor understand. Their contempt, much of it slanderous, had worried him no more than the bites of horseflies on safari. Now venturing forth from his own friendly native world, he had been snared in pity by the first white girl he had spoken to in years. Calamity Jane!

He asked, "Is that all the household, then? Just the two children?"

"That's all—except for Angus, of course."

Denny asked patiently, "Who is Angus?"

"Uncle Angus! I'm sorry—I thought you must have been there." Lucien dangled the bait and was obviously disappointed when Denny ignored it. In a moment he went on, "Angus McBrayne is *her* brother—not Stanhope's."

"Religious, too?"

Lucien laughed. "Good God, no! He's as different again. . . . You ought to meet them. Old Jessie Stanhope, as fierce and upright as a prophet, brother Angus going off in the woods . . ." He hesitated and flushed.

"What's the matter with him?" Denny asked. "What's the matter with brother Angus?"

"He's—well—he's a drinker."

Denny almost laughed aloud as Lucien dropped his glance. He said, "And that, I imagine, doesn't make him exactly popular?"

"The old woman hates it."

"But she lets him stay?"

"Yes. There again—it's odd. Of course, he's a good farmer, but how she can reconcile his drunkenness with her religious scruples. . . ."

"Scruples!" Denny stirred with genuine anger. "Whoever heard of that type of Bible-thumper ever letting scruples interfere with her interests?" Then, quickly, before he could reveal himself further, he asked, "And she dotes on the boy Ian?"

Lucien said, "Dotes on him! She'd do anything for his sake. Anything. It's almost pathetic."

"And how does the girl fit into all this?"

Lucien gave his malicious grin. "She doesn't. There's some inhuman relationship—I can't understand. Old Jessie Stanhope adores her son, bullies her husband and tolerates her brother. But her daughter—I really believe she hates her daughter."



## CHAPTER FOUR

AS IT HAPPENED, he had to make his first tour of the station alone. While they were drinking coffee on the veranda the houseboy brought a message from Palethorpe. "Mau Mau killing at Kipango. Headman and family. Shall I follow or return for patrol?" As Lucien passed the message across the small wicker table, Denny saw his peculiar smile, teeth bared, nose wrinkled as to a bad smell, and he realised that the expression was not a smile at all but a movement of the facial muscles which, through long custom, had become involuntary. Denny wondered how he would look if he had cause for genuine gladness.

Lucien asked, "What do you want me to do, sir?"

"Where is Kipango?"

"Across the valley. You can see . . ." He pointed over the parade ground. "You can see over there—below that area of dark rock, half-way up the escarpment."

"How long would it take to get there?"

"By car?"

"Of course."

"The trouble is," Lucien said, "you can only drive as far as the river track. Beyond that it's a rough walk—and all uphill."

"Won't a jeep take it?"

Lucien looked uncomfortable. "There are only two station jeeps. Palethorpe's got one. I'm afraid the other is u.s."

"What's wrong with it?"

"I'm not sure, sir. Something to do with the steering."

"Then we'll have to take my car."

Lucien looked at him in surprise. "There's no need for you to be going, sir. We can send a message, calling Palethorpe back, or I can go across by myself." He stood up, buckling on his belt and holster. He said, with just the

faintest air of patronage, "This happens regularly, you know—two or three times a week."

"Then it's time we did something about it."

Lucien flushed. "Of course, sir. I hope you don't think . . ."

"If men are being killed in my district, I want to know about it."

"That's understood, sir. But I thought—as this seems to be a more or less routine killing . . ."

"What do you mean—routine?"

Lucien shrugged. "Well, I mean, they're only blacks."

Denny rose carefully to his feet. For a moment he stood quietly, with eyes closed to the hard sunlight, while the waves of anger settled in his brain. Because he was drunk he was cautious, and before long common sense came to his elbow like an old friend. It told him that this was not the country for anger. In the thin air emotions burned erratically; tempers flared out of all proportion to the hurt. He had seen enough examples of it when he had first come to the colony twenty years ago. Then it had troubled him, and for a time he had joined as passionately as the others in one violent crusade after another. But on his lonely patrols he had seen these troubles objectively—pest control, native labour, game laws, the local register—and in a moment of illumination he had realised that they were small matters, inflated grotesquely by the uncertain tempers of the European community. At these unnatural heights anger and suspicion and malice were the servants of the white man and although they came so readily they were not to be trusted.

He said, "Look here, Lucien—we've got to rub along together. We might as well understand each other. I've been out here twenty years. I know the natives. I reckon I understand them as well as most. I don't use, and I don't expect my colleagues to use, such expressions as 'only blacks' or 'niggers' or 'wogs'. When you've been out here as long as I have, you'll know that they're men and women,

not so different from ourselves. They're human beings . . ." He paused, realising that to Lucien he must sound ridiculously pompous. He picked up his own belt and holster.

Lucien said, "With respect, sir, you don't know the Kikuyu."

"It doesn't alter the principle."

They walked down the hill, past the rambling, single-storeyed hospital, and turning left through a gate in the barbed-wire fence came on to the parade ground. Lucien pointed, "Your office, sir; the prison; guardroom; the M.T. garage."

Denny looked to the wired compound where a dozen natives, guarded by an armed policeman, were lounging in the dusk. "The detention camp," explained Lucien, following his gaze.

"A detention camp *and* a prison?"

"Prison is for the criminals, sir. With these present troubles we're never short of desperate characters. It would be a pity to put these petty offenders in with them."

"I agree. The principle is good." Denny squinted at the lolling black men, magnificent specimens mostly. "But they shouldn't be kept like that, doing nothing. They should be given a job of work."

"I'm sure you're right, sir. Lucien allowed the respectful agreement to settle before adding spitefully, "But you'll also find, sir, with experience, that there aren't enough police to look after them. Here in the compound one policeman with a rifle can look after the lot."

Denny said, "If you're short of police, you should recruit more. Surely that's not difficult."

"We're already up to our complement."

"Then the complement must be increased." It was blindly hot on the parade ground, and Denny tried hard to avoid expressing his irritation. Because he had taken an instant dislike to his Assistant he was determined to give him every chance—even to the extent of ignoring his veiled sarcasm, the malicious smile. "I'll need all the labour I can

get when I start this road. If it's necessary to enlist more police I'll see the P.C."

"It will need more than his consent, sir; a Government order, at least."

"Then we'll get a Government order." Wiping the cold sweat from his forehead with his bare forearm, he walked over to the M.T. garage, where the Buick was pushing its sleek bonnet into the sun. On the running-board a boy was nodding in near slumber. "Ali!" The boy woke instantly with a flash of white teeth.

"We're going out, Ali. Is the car ready?"

"Yes, bwana."

"Plenty of petrol?"

"Yes, bwana."

Denny nodded without expressing his secret pleasure in Ali's efficiency. There had been a time, soon after he had been appointed D.C., when his position had seemed to demand a driver as well as a personal boy. For a few weeks he had stretched his patience to cover flat tyres, grinding gears, dented mudguards, until in the inevitable explosion he had allowed Ali to return with clucking tongue to the car he loved. There had never been a need to reprove Ali. He was as perfect in his own job—his two jobs—as it was reasonably possible to expect. Denny was proud of him, not only because he covered up some of his own less fortunate moments, but because he was a living example of what the intelligent native could become.

Lucien was saying, "Don't you think, sir, we should organise a patrol?"

"Yes, who's the N.C.O. in charge?"

"Sergeant Nagaske. Your boy can fetch him."

Denny climbed into the front seat beside Ali. "We'll call at the guardroom on our way out."

They turned from the parade ground on to the road, lurching, almost over-toppling, where lorries had churned in the rainy season. 'We'll get that filled in,' Denny thought. Because he knew about roads he was as conscious of pot-

holes and ruts and wrong cambers as another D.C. would have been about incorrect details of dress in his police. To the right of the road, just beyond the district office, a large two-storeyed building lay exposed behind a hideously painted fence. Denny pointed. "What the hell's that?"

"The home of our local millionaire, sir. You remember I told you about Mohammed."

"The Syrian trader?" He craned his neck backwards to get a further view and saw against the wall of fading blue a dazzling red limousine. The colours were so garish—the striped fence, the house, the car—that even he, who had come to know the exuberant coat of Africa, felt an æsthetic shock. "He certainly believes in colour."

Lucien sniggered in the back seat. "It's bad enough outside. They say it's far worse inside."

Denny asked curiously, "You've never been?"

"No. It wouldn't do. The Chief—Baker—would never have approved."

"What's wrong with Mohammed?"

There was a long pause as the car lurched over the rocks and débris of a dried-up stream. Turning round a bend in the track they surprised a leopard carrying its prey—a young deer or a dog: it was gone too quickly for them to see. Denny asked again, "What's wrong with Mohammed?"

"That's not an easy question to answer, sir. There are rumours, hints of a scandal. It's hard to put your finger on anything definite."

"Is it that he's just too successful?"

"There could be something in that. He takes money from everyone—the white man as much as the Indians and the 'Kukes'."

"That wouldn't make him exactly popular."

"I agree. Then again there's his race, his religion. He's an odd man out whichever way you look at it. There's bound to be a lot of prejudice."

Denny slewed round and rested his forearm over the back of the seat. "I'm anxious to get a clear picture of this

Mohammed. As I said before, he could be dangerous," He looked at his Assistant, jerking about on the back seat like a puppet. "What do you really think?"

Lucien didn't hesitate, and his ready answer carried conviction. "Think, sir? I wouldn't trust him an inch."

They jolted along the valley road in a haze of almost tangible heat. Beside the river, in the shadow of a thorn, a boy crouched on his haunches, watching a few scraggy cattle. A hornbill, as big as a domestic turkey, made a few yards of ungainly flight before the car's approach and landed clumsily again beside some rocks. They passed another village, a few poor huts and the inevitable tin shed of the Indian trader. A dog chased them half-heartedly through the wake of dust, and a thin, elderly Kikuyu stood immobile with legs crossed. It was difficult for Denny to realise that this quiet African scene could be so deceptive. From what he had read and from the figures in the Provincial Commissioner's office a village such as this was the natural prey for the Mau Mau. In a few hours, when darkness completed the isolation, the villages would be helpless before a ruthless organised attack. But . . . Denny still couldn't fully accept it. He *knew* the blacks

From the main river road which led down to Manake another track branched left covering the river by a Bailey bridge and climbing steeply on a surface of loose stones beyond the further bank. From the bridge the first slope looked impossibly steep, almost vertical, and Denny realised before they had soared through two gears that, with Ali driving, they would never climb it. He was too careful, too thoughtful of the car, on a slope which could only be surmounted by ruthless attack. Denny could have done it, but he was feeling tired and ill after the oppressive valley heat. Let Ali try.

The car groaned and lurched on the uneven surface.

Lining the track on the downward slope a few saplings of birch gave an illusion of safety. It was plain that if Ali skidded or turned from the narrow track the car would

topple disastrously down an even steeper slope. But Denny had never been lacking in courage. He shouted at Ali above the din of the engine, "Keep her going! Keep your foot down! Keep her going!" Beads of sweat stood out on Ali's worried forehead. His pink tongue licked nervously across his lips. "Keep her going!" If Ali had been alone he would have stopped before this (if he had ever started on such an unpromising climb), but, goaded by his master, he strove desperately to go as hard as his wavering confidence would allow. The car lurched, slid sideways from a larger rock, and hovered for one desperate minute with one wheel over the chasm. The other rear wheel ground at the dust and slowly, imperceptibly, the big black car pulled itself to safety.

Petrified by terror, Ali would have driven into the rock face on the other side of the track if Denny hadn't pushed the wheel round at the last minute. They stopped with a jerk, as the engine stalled.

"Sorry about that." Denny turned with a grin to Lucien, who was sitting white-faced but apparently calm on the back seat. He was pleased when his Assistant managed an uncertain smile. "Thought we were going to take off."

They climbed out and stood in the chequered shade beneath the trees. Down the hill a hundred yards below and seemingly almost at their feet was the focal point of cruel sunlight with the level verges of grass and one end of the bridge.

Denny turned and looked up the hill. "How much farther of this?"

"It's like this most of the way. Not so steep perhaps, but the surface is as bad—worse in parts."

Denny shook his head. "We need a jeep."

"Even that, sir, would only take us half-way."

Beyond the trees the mountain lay open and shimmering in the sun. Up, almost vertically, the track wound across the green, disappearing into thickets, behind abutments of rock, to emerge again like a red vein on the face of the mountain.

"It's more than a jeep we need," Denny said, "we want a new road."

"Oh, that . . ." Lucien hesitated, and then went on unexpectedly. "I'm sorry about the jeep, sir. I should have explained how it happened. There was a party at Manake a few nights back. The French Club. Tom Palethorpe was invited but—quite honestly—he wasn't keen. It was my fault. I persuaded him to go."

Denny took out a packet of cigarettes and handed one to Lucien. He fumbled deliberately with his lighter, making the confession easier.

"On the way back—he was stone-cold sober—he saw, or . . ." Lucien hesitated over his cigarette. Then he went on, picking his words carefully. "He thought he saw a party of 'Kukes' waiting beside the track."

"Was he alone?"

"No, sir. He had a native policeman—and, of course, the driver."

"Armed?"

"Oh yes, sir. Palethorpe had his revolver, the others had rifles."

Denny waited patiently for the reluctant story to emerge. He asked, "Did the others see these 'Kukes'?"

"No, sir, at least . . . It was dark, of course, the shadows play queer tricks, especially—well—to an imaginative boy."

"You think it was imagination?"

"Frankly, sir, I don't know. He could have seen something, but it's unusual to get a raiding party so far from the forest."

"What happened after that?"

Lucien hesitated again and then went carefully on. "He acted quickly—that's not unnatural—he made the driver go full out, although it's a hell of a road. From what I can understand they were lucky to get about a mile from the—ambush before they crashed."

Denny did not look at his assistant. If he had trusted Lucien before he would have accepted this story without



reserve. Now—he couldn't be sure. Yet Lucien had told it with restraint, seemingly trying to protect the boy. If Palethorpe had panicked, and that was the implication, there must be a reason—a reason which Lucien was reluctant to divulge.

Denny asked, "How long has Palethorpe been out here?"

"A few months, sir. That's all."

"His first job?"

"Yes."

Denny pulled on his cigarette. "How do you think he'll make out?"

In the sudden quietness he could hear the skittering of a lizard through the undergrowth and Ali's tuneless whistle as he examined the tyres. "How do you think he'll make out?"

Lucien said, "I think for his own sake, sir, that he'd be better in an office job—Nairobi, perhaps, or Mombasa."

Suddenly Denny was tired of hints. He asked, "You think he's not up to the job? You think he's afraid?"

"I think he'd be better in Nairobi, sir."

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE VILLAGE RESTED on a broad shelf of the mountain, two thousand feet above the valley. From the last precipitous climb, a stony track enclosed by scrub, they emerged suddenly on to a level plateau with the wide Rift stretching away to their feet to Manake and beyond. A field or two of maize and stunted wheat, scorched by the constant sunshine, bowed gratefully beneath the breeze. Denny noticed with approval that round the edges of the plateau and at the lower end of each field a wall of stones and débris had been laid to conserve the soil.

The five huts where the headman had lived with his wives and children were some distance from the main village. Their conical thatches bordered a cattle pen, with the village grain store—a double line of small huts built on stilts to foil the rats—and a hand-mill. The thorn fence of the boma had been breached in two places and the cattle had gone.

As Denny and Lucien were inspecting the damage, they heard native voices carrying on the clear air, "Bwana, D.C. Bwana, D.C.", and in a few minutes a small procession, headed by Palethorpe and one of the village elders, a grizzled old man with a councillor's bronze badge, came down the steep slopes between the trees. There was an odd and impressive air of purpose about them; no chattering or laughing or natural exuberance. The attack on their headman, Denny realised, had been a profound shock to their conservative ideas. Death in its various forms, disease, famine, wild beasts, was familiar enough; even the excitement and slaughter of tribal warfare were still fresh in the minds of the older men. But this creeping menace, only half-understood even by the elders, was new and terrible. There was something mystic in it like the mumbo-jumbo of some weird religion, but even the witch-doctors in their days of

power had not killed so ruthlessly and without apparent reason.

The procession formed a semi-circle as Palethorpe and the old man came forward to meet the D.C.

Lucien said, "This is Tom Palethorpe, sir."

"Pleased to meet you, sir." The boy was even younger than he expected, and there was in his pink, open face a defenceless charm which Denny found oddly touching. The boy was young enough to have been his son, and he felt even in the first handshake a paternal solicitude for his protection. Only the faintest down on his upper lip showed that he was of an age to shave. The lined forehead and nervous lips might have belonged to a worried schoolboy. He was apologising in an indeterminate way, "Thought it best to let you know, sir . . . nothing much I could do . . . only a tribal policeman and my driver."

"That's all right," Denny said. "You did the right thing." He looked round at the circle of huts. "Where are the bodies?"

"Over there, sir. I've had them put together."

"How many were killed?"

"Four, sir—the headman and two wives and a child."

"A child?"

"A boy, hardly more than a baby."

Denny said, "I'd like to see them."

"Yes . . . well . . ." From Palethorpe's wavering finger, Denny knew that he had seen them once and didn't want to repeat the experience. He said, almost without thinking, "There's no need for you to come."

In the largest hut the four bodies lay grotesquely at rest. Only the younger woman was unmarked by death. She was lying face downwards, and Denny could see the knotted cord cutting deep into her neck. The others had been hacked almost out of recognition by a dozen simi cuts, and their blood had soaked a dark patch across the reeds. In the farthest corner of the hut was the child, struck down as he beat in terror at the wall

Without a word Denny turned and walked out into the sunlight. He felt desperate for a drink, but although he had a full flask in his pocket, he did not touch it. Nausea and anger and a thick sadness worked on him like a paralysis, a paralysis of hope. He couldn't move. Unless he had seen this with his own eyes he could not have received the full, dreadful impact. Written accounts, figures on a blackboard, were all right for the official mind. But here was the denial of all humanity; the father, the mother strangled as the child was killed. You couldn't show them as figures on a chart.

He heard Lucien say, "It's rather a shock the first time." He nodded, "Yes." And then angrily, "When did all this happen? Why wasn't an alarm given?"

Palethorpe said in his frightened voice, "I have questioned them, sir. I think I've got the complete picture as far as it's possible."

"I'll hear you later," Denny said, and then, to soften his brusqueness, "I'd like to hear what this man has to say." He pointed to the elder. He asked in Ki' Swahili, "What is your name?"

"Kyangi, bwana."

"And you're a councillor?"

"Yes, bwana."

"Tell me how all this happened."

The old man stood with hands clasped before him and told his story with a directness that showed how far he too had been shocked.

"There was no moon, bwana. Headman Lopali was with us before darkness. He left with the child as the light was going from the valley. From that time until we came here this morning we saw nothing, heard nothing."

"How far are your huts?"

"Up there, bwana—four, five stones' throw."

"Nearly half a mile," Palethorpe said in English.

"And you heard nothing?"

"Nothing, bwana."

"Didn't your dogs bark?"

The old man hesitated. "There were some said . . ."

A young man broke in excitedly, "The dogs barked in the night, bwana, not far from dawn."

"Didn't anyone think of coming down here?"

They shrugged. "There was no moon, bwana. Besides . . ."

Denny understood. If the headman was being attacked what could they do? A few young spearmen, inexperienced in war, and the old men. By staying quietly up the hill, there was always the chance that the raiders would pass.

He asked, "Did Lopali only have two wives?"

"No, bwana, there were two more."

"What's happened to them?"

Again the fatalistic shrug. "They have gone."

Denny tried to keep to the hard core of facts; useless to wander off into a morass of pity: the struggling mother watching her terrified child, the other captured women being force-marched to what unknown horror?

He asked, "Was anything stolen?"

"Oh yes, bwana, you see . . ." And now they were voluble in the wrongs that had been done to them. The stolen cattle, the sifted grain stores. "We shall starve, bwana, when the dry season comes."

Denny moved away across the clearing. "I'll see that it's made up. I'll see that you don't starve."

## CHAPTER SIX

NEXT MORNING he sent a message asking Mohammed to call at his office. The tragedy at Kipango had lain with him all night, and when the patrol returned without prisoners he knew that the best weapon against the Mau Mau would be the road which he was to build up the escarpment. No matter what forces were ranged against the raiders (and there was already a humiliatingly large army for such an ill-armed rabble) no major success could be achieved without proper lines of communication. The tracks they had followed yesterday would have been all right for a native police patrol if time was of no account. But with the vast trackless bamboo forests stretching for miles above the high plateau the one essential of attack was speed. There were Kipsigi and Kamasia trackers who could follow a fresh trail over the most unlikely country, but it was useless to bring them, already tired, to a trail that had grown cold.

At breakfast he told Lucien and Palethorpe what he intended to do. "Tomorrow I'll go down to Flamingo Lake."

"About the road?" Lucien sat with spoon poised above his grapefruit, waiting warily, respectfully.

"About the road. I don't know. . . ." He went on restlessly. "I've been looking at the map in bed. There are one or two possible routes—possible from the map, that is. Only a thorough recce will show what it's really like—trees, undergrowth, loose soil."

"It'll be a tough job, sir," young Palethorpe said.

"It'll be a hell of a job—but rewarding. This, I'm convinced, is the way to beat the Mau Mau."

Lucien gave his shallow smile. "You've soon come round to hating them."

Denny nodded sadly and without anger. "Yes, you're right. In a way . . ." He hesitated. "In a way I'm glad

we had the chance to see that killing. Before that I wasn't sure . . ."

"That such things happened?"

"That things happened in that way." He said, "I've asked Mohammed to report to the office this morning. I phoned the P.C. last night. I must say it was something of a shock to learn how much I shall have to rely on friend Mohammed."

Lucien said, "I told you, sir. He's got a finger in every pie."

"Then he could be useful."

"If he decides to be."

Denny said, "He'd better decide to be—unless he wants to feel my boot under his fat arse."

Palethorpe, who had been hovering nervously on the edge of conversation, blurted out, "I'm afraid, sir, you won't get Mohammed today."

"Why not?"

"Well, I happen to know, he's down at Banare."

"At Banare? That's where he has his main store?"

Denny stared idly at the boy, wondering why he should know where Mohammed was, but when he saw Palethorpe's sudden blush he shrugged mentally. It was none of his business, and he felt angry when Lucien tossed a malicious question: "Don't say that you've been getting friendly with Mohammed, Tom."

The boy said, without looking up, "Not friendly . . . it was only . . . I wanted to buy a present to send home."

Denny asked, "Where is Banare?"

"It's on the lake—the valley side," Lucien said.

"Near to Manake?"

"Quite near, sir, only there's no connecting road round that side of the lake."

"How do I get there?"

"You follow the Manake road to Venner's Gorge, then about a mile on—before you get to the lake—you cross the river and follow the track round the foothills."

"Is it easy to find? I don't want to lose my way in that burnt-up valley."

"Shall I come with you, sir?" Palethorpe suggested, and then blushed at his own temerity.

Denny grinned good-naturedly. "Why not?"

They left after breakfast, before the sun had gathered its full strength above the mountains. Sitting in the back seat as Ali drove, he caught some of Palethorpe's boyish enthusiasm. As the Buick wound slowly down the valley track they surprised a herd of elands nibbling the short grass beside the road and later a buffalo lumbered stupidly before them for a hundred yards or so. Glancing sideways, Denny saw Palethorpe's eager face, the rifle held alertly between his knees. It was still a game to him, tense and rather frightening; it was a substitute for rugger, the common bath after the match, the pints of mild and bitter. Once, when a guinea-fowl flapped wildly across their path, he raised the rifle to his shoulder, but the bird was out of range before he could get a sight.

Palethorpe grinned, "I'll get him on the way back, sir."

There was something oddly defenceless about the cadet which Denny liked.

He said, "You've not grown tired of Africa yet?"

"Tired of it? Good Lord, no, sir."

"Is it what you expected?"

Palethorpe said, "More than I expected. I looked forward to all this——" He waved vaguely at the arid, uninteresting scrub, the occasional giant thorn, the parched earth studded unexpectedly by brilliant succulents. "I looked forward to the freedom, the sport, but . . . what I didn't expect, was—the vastness of it all. I just can't get used to it."

"You never will," Denny told him. "Even when you've been out here as long as I have you'll never feel," he groped for the word, "you'll never feel *familiar* with Africa. Respect, yes; fear possibly. But you'll never feel that you know the country. The longer you're here the more you'll realise that."



The boy asked respectfully, "How long have you been here, sir?"

"Twenty years."

"That's a long time."

Denny nodded. "Yes. It's a long time. How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"That's how old I was when I first came." He smiled ruefully. "It doesn't seem so long ago."

Across the plain a herd of zebra gleamed in the sun. The stallion raised his head, watched them for a minute, and then led the herd away in a rising arc of dust.

Palethorpe said, "I suppose, sir, you've seen a good many changes in twenty years."

Denny nodded absently. He asked, "Did you come straight here from university?"

"I had six months at the Government School first."

"So a year ago you were in England?"

"At Cambridge."

Denny asked carefully, "Did you know the Stanhope boy? I'm told he was there."

"Ian Stanhope? Good lord, sir, you don't mean to say . . ."

"I don't know him. I've only met his sister."

"'Calamity Jane'?" Denny's flicker of annoyance must have shown, for the boy added hurriedly, "I didn't realise, sir, that she was a friend of yours."

"She's not. I told you—I happen to have met her."

The boy went on reflectively, "They're a queer family. You may have heard. I knew Ian at the Varsity. He was a freshman, of course, but a good runner."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"We were both members of the athletic team. He was damn good—could run the hundred in 'evens'. It was only when I was leaving I heard that his home was out here. I'd already applied for the Service. He gave me his address. I didn't think much of it then—the chance of seeing him

again seemed so small. It really was damned funny that my first district should include his home."

Denny eased himself to a more comfortable position in the jolting seat. They were far down in the valley now, and he could see above the escarpment where the rolling highlands ended and the forests began. They were too low to see her farm. He asked, "Do you see much of them?"

Palethorpe hesitated. "No, sir—the last time I saw Ian was in Manake."

"At the club?"

"Good lord, no. He doesn't belong to a club."

"Is the old lady really such a dragon?"

Palethorpe grimaced and then laughed. "I don't want to prejudice you, sir. If your road is going through her territory you'll meet her for sure. Better go with an open mind."

Denny grinned. "Perhaps you're right."

The day was warming up now and the heat rolled and settled in the airless valley. Looking back Denny saw their cloud of red dust hanging, apparently motionless, in the torrid atmosphere. The few huts they passed from time to time looked dirty and ill-cared-for, and the thorny scrub was powdered red for fifty yards beside the road. The cattle standing dejectedly in the beds of dried-up streams were scraggy, and from the dust beside the huts children watched the car with listless eyes.

It wasn't until they reached the river that the scene changed. There the vegetation thickened, the cows were fatter, and the land became more and more fertile as they approached Flamingo Lake.

Palethorpe, who had been silent for some time, touched Denny on the knee and pointed to a swirling mass of water ahead. "Venner's Gorge." He had to shout above the roar of water. Denny nodded, and wondered how he could have passed there yesterday without noticing. He must have been asleep or more drunk than he had imagined. He felt now for his flask, but, seeing the boy's pink, artless face, left it

untouched in his pocket. He could last out until they reached Banare.

There was a sudden drop as the road swung down beside the gorge, and they were moving carefully to the foot of the steep descent when the car lurched sideways and stopped.

Denny climbed out, feeling the spray from the waterfall cool on his face, and saw the near front wheel resting on a deflated tyre. The din from the waterfall was too loud to make conversation possible. He pointed at the wheel and shook his head.

Reluctantly Palethorpe pulled himself from the car. He stood nervously, with the rifle held at the stock and trigger-guard, ready for action. Denny grinned and shouted, "You won't take a wheel off with that."

Palethorpe gave an uncertain smile, but he still gripped the rifle and looked round carefully as he walked through the ankle-deep grass beside the road. He's afraid, thought Denny with pity. The poor kid's afraid. He went across to him and shouted, "Care to go down the road a bit? Nothing you can do here."

Palethorpe nodded and walked nervously along the grass verge towards a line of thorn trees a hundred yards downstream.

"Now then." Denny went back to Ali, who was crouching beside the flat tyre. He watched the pink and black hand caressing the rubber. "Bwana!" The black boy produced a metal spike, three inches long, and held it aloft. "Nail humbug."

As he took it in his hand and felt the roughly-shaped metal, Denny had a sudden premonition. Palethorpe's nervousness, the sheltering rocks and undergrowth, the blanket of noise: he knelt quickly beside Ali and drew his revolver.

Looking back he saw that Palethorpe too had dropped to his knees and was holding the rifle across his chest. If this was truly an ambush . . .

Denny looked round angrily as a bullet tore up the dust

in front of the car. Above the roar of the fall it was impossible to locate the sound. "Take cover," he shouted. But Ali was already lying face downwards beneath the car.

He scrambled round and ran, crouching, to a few rocks just off the road. "Where the blazes!" He was angry and unafraid—angry because he could do nothing but wait until the hidden enemy fired again. He shouted to Palethorpe, "Did you see where it came from?" but he knew that his voice would not carry that distance, and indeed Palethorpe, lying full length beneath some bushes, looked too scared to be of much help.

He waited alertly, scanning the rocks beyond the gorge, the thick line of bushes—ample cover for a whole gang of Kikuyu. But nothing came, no shot, no movement in the undergrowth. The sudden tension, and now the need for patience, reminded him again of his thirst. Taking the flask from his pocket he uncovered the stopper with one hand and took a mouthful of whisky. He wiped the back of his free hand across his mouth. His spirits rose, and his pride.

Rising, apparently confident, but watching all the time for any movement across the river, he walked slowly down to where Palethorpe was lying. "Are you all right?"

"All right, sir, but don't you think . . ." The boy had the grey pallor of fear.

"It's all over now," Denny said. "They took the one shot and ran." He added encouragingly, "It was probably you coming down here that saved us—you and the rifle."

The boy rose shakily to his feet. For a moment Denny thought he was going to faint and he held out his flask of whisky. "Here take a drink of this."

He missed nothing, neither the beads of fear on the freckled forehead, the hands grasping the flask nor the greedy gulping of the whisky. He laughed. "Take it easy, son. You'll be drunk as a coot."

"What?" Palethorpe stared at him stupidly with the unstoppered flask still held in both hands.

"You drink as though you're used to it."

Palethorpe handed the flask back reluctantly. "Not really." Surprisingly he took a flask from his own pocket. "You may as well know, sir, I've got this." He shook it. "Half empty. I'll have to ask Mohammed . . ."

His voice trailed off. He stared round vacantly, as though he had forgotten what he had been frightened of. He added inconsequently, "I'm surprised he didn't tell you about it."

"Who? Mohammed?"

"No."

Lucien, of course. He saw the whole set-up now. The boy wilting beneath the strain of fear: ambushes, the shot in the night, the swift simi cut. Savage and unreasoning death was everywhere. Denny had never drunk to cover up fear, because he was naturally a courageous man, but he was sensitive enough to understand the paralysis of fear in another. Again he felt only pity for the young man, a desire to protect. He said clumsily, "Whisky's all right, you know, but it's a bad thing to depend on. Much better rely on this." He tapped the rifle. "When we get back I'll take you shooting. You must practise until you're confident. A cool head and a quick shot—no one can touch you."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

THEY WERE DELAYED AGAIN before they reached Banare. Lurching along the track which followed the northern margin of the lake, they saw the ancient car glinting in the sun; a bull-nosed Morris, painted black, a tattered hood; a real museum piece. Denny felt an unexpected excitement as he recognised the girl standing by the open bonnet. Calamity Jane. A young man in khaki shirt and shorts who had been bending over the car straightened as he heard their engine, and walked towards them waving his arms.

"Paleface, you old sod!"

"Stanners!"

As Palethorpe leapt joyfully from the car, Denny watched the girl. She hadn't seen him yet, hidden in the dark interior of the Buick, and her attention was focused on her brother and her brother's friend. Whether she disapproved of Palethorpe or perhaps of her brother's greeting of him was not clear, but she stood with arms lightly folded, lips pursed, waiting for their attention.

"What seems to be the trouble?" Palethorpe had forgotten Denny in the excitement of being an undergraduate again. "Really, old boy, if you will come out in this pre-historic monster!"

"It's a perfectly good car," the girl said in her heavily adult air. "All it needs is someone who understands it."

Palethorpe nodded sheepishly. "Oh . . . good morning, Miss Stanhope."

"If you or your driver know anything about cars . . ."

"Well . . ." Palethorpe looked round uncertainly.

"We'll be glad to help," said Denny, coming out into the sunshine. "My driver's pretty good. . . ." He smiled at the girl and was unaccountably pleased because she flushed as she recognised him. "Good morning, Miss Stanhope."

"Good morning." She lowered her gaze and frowned, as she felt the flush spreading up her face.

"Don't tell me you've met," her brother said in surprise.

She hesitated, growing angry in her embarrassment as they all watched, and at last it was Denny who came to her rescue.

"Only once. But you see—I haven't forgotten." He smiled again, not caring what the two boys thought. He wanted her to know.

She said, "This is my brother, you haven't met. Ian—this is Mr. Denny."

"How do you do, sir." The boy was staring at him frankly, looking, Denny guessed, for the signs of dissipation. "I'd heard about you, of course."

"Of course."

"What I mean is—we knew that you were to be our new D.C." It was plain that he had heard a great deal more, and for the first time Denny felt a vague regret that he had thrown away his reputation. If the boy thought of him like this, and the mother . . . But it was obvious that, despite her unyielding rectitude, the girl was ready to accept him as a friend. She said, "If your driver could help . . ."

As Ali bent with supercilious confidence over the engine, Barbara and Denny turned without talking, and strolled down the close-ridged earth towards the lake. Cattle had gathered there in the rainy seasons and their footprints had dried like cement casts. Denny touched the girl's arm as she stumbled and again he had that vague feeling of pleasure. She looked younger today in a print dress and low-heeled walking shoes, but he couldn't, even if he tried, describe her as a beauty. Although he was glad to see her again he didn't have to analyse his emotions. He had helped her and she had thanked him: if he had asked himself the question he would have said it was pity. Love was what he had given to Habbasiyah, whose firm young body, taut breasts, skin smooth as black velvet, still filled him with desire. This pale-faced, sandy-haired woman was important because she

might turn out to be a friend, a friend in that narrow, unforgiving world of the European.

She said unexpectedly, "I came down here today hoping to see you," and as he looked in surprise, "Oh, we had to come down some time this week, only I took a chance. I guessed when you heard about the road you would want to see Mohammed."

"How do you know about the road?"

"Why, everyone knows about it," she explained. "Since these troubles began it was obvious that we must have at least the chance of protection. To get here this morning, we had to leave at dawn, and yet," she pointed up the further escarpment, "you can see our farm quite plainly up there. Well, you know how long it takes."

He said, "You think that everyone knows. Is that true?"

"Yes. You see, there were protest meetings. All the farmers on that part of the plateau got together. . . ."

"I can imagine."

"At last the Government had to do something. We sent a deputation and we were promised a road."

"How did you know that it would be my responsibility?"

She looked at him curiously. "I thought you must know. What happened was that the P.C., who was at this meeting, said he knew an expert on roads. If this man—you, presumably—was made D.C. in place of poor Baker, who had just been killed, the road would be in expert hands. He didn't mention your name, so we didn't know . . ." She stopped suddenly and blushed in that way that made her look extraordinarily young and inexperienced.

"You didn't know who you'd be getting!" He finished the sentence for her and grinned to disclaim any bitterness.

"What I mean is . . ."

"It's all right, I know what the Europeans say. It doesn't worry me." Any annoyance he might have felt was swamped in the gratitude he felt for the P.C. and for Matheson whose friendly hand could still reach out from retirement. With their backing and perhaps the friendship of this girl. . . .



She asked, "Is it really true?"

"Is what true?"

"That you don't care what your own people say?"

He took her question seriously and without anger. "It's true enough. At least . . ." He hesitated and held her arm again as they jumped a ditch. "You mustn't think that I'm . . . what would you say? . . . a renegade? I don't particularly care for the white folk you meet out here: I'll be honest about that; but that's only because they are so damned prejudiced."

"Against the blacks?"

"Yes. And I know what I'm talking about. I've been out here twenty years, I reckon I know this country as well as any."

She interrupted severely, "Do you think that gives you the right to go against your own people?"

"It's not that. It's only—I like to be tolerant."

"I see." She said this so primly, with head thrown back, eyes severe, that he knew that she and probably her whole family were negrophobes; the white man, God's elect ruling the roost, governing his servant, the black, with firmness, intolerance and, if possible, with justice.

He said slowly, "It's so easy to take their view about the native. Obviously it's an explosive subject. They're frightened to relax one second from their rigid *apartheid*."

"At least," she said, "you've not been guilty of that mistake—from what I've heard."

He said levelly, "It seems you've heard a hell of a lot. That's my biggest complaint about you settlers—there's too much time for scandal."

Unexpectedly she stopped and rested her fingers on his arm. In a conciliatory tone she went on, "It is obvious that we belong to two different camps. I've always thought . . . there's no chance of compromise: and yet," she looked at him frankly, "I'd like to try. You were kind to me yesterday and . . ." She faltered.

Without another word or excuse they turned from the

subject, dropping it by tacit consent, and stood side by side to watch the flamingoes round the shallows of the lake. It was a scene of unbelievable beauty. The blue lake, surrounded by sand of dazzling whiteness, had a background of rolling hills, the sudden cliffs, and, nearer, the spreading green of fever and podo trees. Above the plateau the forests leant against the sharp blueness of the sky, which was itself pierced by the broad white dagger of the mountain.

But it was the lake and the birds feeding on it which held their attention. Like a broad pink mosaic the flamingoes stood a hundred yards deep, round the entire margin of water. They were there in thousands, hundreds of thousands, and above the stillness their quiet undertone sounded like a million people muttering a long way off. Watching them for a few minutes you forgot that they were living creatures and thought of them as just another line of pure colour.

"Aren't they lovely?"

"Yes." He asked, "Why did you want to see me today?"

"Oh, that. . . ." His question dragged her back to reality. "It's only . . . When I thought of where you must have been yesterday morning . . ." Her words trailed uncertainly away as she remembered the precipice, the red road below, and the edge of eternity.

"Where I stopped on the road to High Ridge?"

"Yes." She went on, "You were so kind to me, I wanted to warn you."

"That I stopped more or less where Baker was murdered?"

"That's right. So you knew?"

"Not then. The P.C. told me."

For a moment she did not reply. A native pye dog had rushed from one of the huts that straggled on the outskirts of Banare and was now barking at the water's edge. The spidery legs of a hundred flamingoes crossed and re-crossed in agitation and then a score of the birds flew up into the air showing the deeper red beneath their wings. The girl asked in a tight repressed voice, "You told the P.C. about taking the wrong road?"

"Yes, but not about meeting you—if that's what you're worried about."

She was instantly apologetic. "Please forgive me. I shouldn't have doubted. Only—it's something I want to forget, something I'm afraid of."

"I know." He said in his rough fatherly voice, "Much better get it off your chest though—to someone you can trust."

"To you?"

"If you like."

As he stared deliberately away from her across the undulating blue he was aware that she was looking at him, sizing him up. The sun was blazing in a fury now, and the flies were a constant irritation. He ran his tongue over dry lips.

At last she said, "I'd like to tell you. It would be a relief to say it out loud, but," she shook her head regretfully, "it's all so sordid, and I—you'll think me such a fool."

"I've been called a few things myself," Denny said. "I may be the only one who could understand."

She nodded. "Perhaps you are. If only . . ."

"Better tell me now, while we're comparative strangers. Later on it may be more difficult."

She nodded again, this time with pleasure. "That means that I shall see you again?"

"Of course." He saw that she wasn't going to tell him now, however much she wanted to, and that it would be better to keep her confidence by patience. He said, "The road, so far as I can see, will come close to your land. We may even have to trespass a bit if that's the easiest way."

"Then you'll be coming near our farm?"

"Once I've cleared the escarpment."

She said with real gladness, "I can't tell how happy I shall be—to have someone I can trust, to know that you are bringing safety nearer each day. Half these dreadful fears . . ." The censor of embarrassment cut off her words and she went tamely on, "You must come and visit us whenever you

are on High Ridge. Even my mother. . . . We can only be grateful to the man who is bringing us safety."

Back on the road Ali was swinging the starting-handle and at last the bull-nosed Morris clattered to life. Palethorpe and young Ian Stanhope whooped a college cry. The girl said, "I'd better be going." She turned reluctantly, took a few steps through the coarse grass, and then waited for him to join her.

She said, "I'm sorry I haven't the courage to tell you about yesterday. I don't want you to think me a complete fool. Only . . . there are some things which are not mine to tell."

He took her arm, with pleasure now, and thought to himself: Hell's bells! I must be crackers. I'll be wanting to take her to bed next.

But there was warm friendliness as she added, "I'm so grateful to you for—well, everything. There's nobody else I would sooner tell—nobody at all."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

MOHAMMED'S STORE AT BANARE was only a long L-shaped shed in a barbed-wire compound, but in it there was everything that the inhabitants of Manake district, black or white, would be likely to need: guns, ammunition, petrol, oil, spare parts for most types of motor, small diesel engines, every kind of saw; there were drills and hammers and spanners and ploughshares; you could buy timber in planks or in the trunk, in hardwood or in soft white pine; the farmers would buy their seed at one end of the shed and sell surplus crops in the wooden lean-to outside. Because there were goods worth thousands of pounds and many of them highly dangerous at a time of civil strife, there was a police detachment in the adjoining compound, and a day and night patrol by tribal police.

When they drove through the gateway between the wire a Goanese clerk who came out, blinking in the sun, told them that Mohammed was out.

"Isn't that his car?" There couldn't be two such cars in the whole of Kenya.

"Oh yes, sir, but Mr. Mohammed go out on foot. He be back soon."

"Where did he go?"

The clerk gave a discreet shrug. "I not knowing, sir. Maybe you come into the office—have some refreshment."

"I'll look round." Denny walked slowly through the junk which littered the yard. It was desperately hot; the sunlight, caught in the corrugated-iron trap, was almost too much for the human body to bear. Denny took out his flask and gulped a mouthful of whisky. He felt hot and tired and old. The red dust of the road was sharp to his tongue, and he gulped, almost choked, as the whisky washed more dust into his throat. To hell with Mohammed! He was irritated that the Syrian was not there to meet them,

although he could hardly have known that they were coming. Bloody Syrians! Never there when they were wanted, but ready to run a mile for a penn'orth of profit. He picked his way very deliberately across a pile of débris: a curved sheet of corrugated iron, a broken bath, odd skeins of wire.

"If you don't mind, sir, I'll wait back at the office in the shade. . . ."

"What?" He turned irascibly to Palethorpe, who had followed him uncertainly down the yard. "Yes, all right. Do what you want."

"Unless you'd sooner . . ."

"Why the blazes should I!" He regretted his anger immediately as he saw the boy's face, and then was irritated again because he had to apologise. "Get along to the office. It's all right. I only want to see what he's got." As Palethorpe turned gratefully away, Denny called after him, "And if you see that bastard Mohammed, tell him I want to have a word with him."

He went pawing his way across the yard, grumbling to himself about Mohammed, the heat, the flies, the filth in the yard. Resting for a moment in the shade he thought: Christ! I'm getting to sound like an old man. His khaki shirt was sodden with sweat and he could feel the constant irritation of his waist-band. For a second he leant against the iron wall and then leapt away. The iron was too hot to touch. A red patch showed on his forearm with a few flakes of rust. Bloody traders in their—tin huts! He had completely forgotten about the girl.

He was still sweating in the meagre shade when Mohammed came bustling into the compound. Following a few yards behind was an Indian girl in a *sari*, who hesitated as she saw Mohammed hurrying towards his visitors and then without a word retraced her steps towards the village. So that was it!

Mohammed saw Denny at once and started to hurry across the yard. Palethorpe came from the office to intercept him and, it seemed to Denny, was brushed impatiently aside.

"Mr. Denny." The Syrian was calling his welcome before he had even begun to clamber over the obstacles. Denny had a chance to watch him closely, the squat, thick-set body, heavy jowls, the hooked nose and imperious mouth. He was cast like a Roman emperor.

But his welcome was genial enough and his hand-clasp firm when at last he succeeded in reaching Denny. "So sorry—all this rubbish. Always I think—that can go, and that, and that. But where? Shall I have it carted out on to the plain? The jackals won't eat a tin bath, or the vultures. I leave it there, and Mr. Lucien hear of it or Mr. Palethorpe. Then I am in trouble."

"You could dump it in the lake."

"But no. Is that possible? Even in its deepest part a man could not drown. Once again I shall be found out. Once again I shall be in trouble."

Denny said impatiently, "Well, that's your affair. I haven't come to tell you how to keep your place clean."

"No, no. It's about the road?"

"Is there anyone who doesn't know about this road?" Denny asked angrily.

Mohammed shrugged. "Well, you understand—it is of some importance to the whole district—to the white farmers because it will bring them security, to the black man because it means work, good pay; and to the Mau Mau because it will be a serious threat to their safety."

"And to the Syrian trader—more profits?"

Mohammed accepted the observation without anger. "To me, yes; it will mean profits, but also to you. With my help the road is a practical proposition, without it—well—you'd be wasting your time."

Denny rubbed the stinging sweat from his eyes with the back of his hand. "Let's go into your office." He observed, carefully avoiding the scattered tins, "One of my colleagues made the same remark. I said you'd better help or you'd get my foot under your fat arse."

"That won't be necessary." Mohammed was trotting to

catch up with him. He panted, "When I heard you were coming, Mr. Denny, there was a gladness here in my heart."

"If you think I'll be easier than another D.C. about prices . . ."

"No, no. It isn't that. I tell you——" He paused as they came to the gauze-covered door of the office. Inside, like a boy waiting for his headmaster, was Palethorpe; and as he smiled uncertainly at both, Denny found himself wondering who was the headmaster: himself or Mohammed. The Syrian said with a faint echo of arrogance, "If Mr. Palethorpe would care to make himself comfortable here . . ."

"Why shouldn't he come too?" Denny said, ready to be irritable with anyone. "There's nothing secret about what I've come for."

"Of course not, only I thought . . ."

"I'll stay here, sir, if you don't mind," Palethorpe said, rather too accommodatingly, Denny thought, but he nodded. "Just as you like."

The inner room was Mohammed's office, a large white-washed room, cooled by ceiling fans. On a table at the side were bottles of whisky, gin, vermouth. "A drink?"

"Thanks."

"Whisky?"

"Please."

With the first mouthful he felt a different man, more hopeful, more tolerant. He found himself regretting his earlier rudeness. "You said that you could help me, Mohammed—with the road, I mean. I shall need that help, of course—all that I can get."

Mohammed bent his head ironically. "You are the D.C., Mr. Denny. I am yours to command."

As a show of grace, Denny asked, "What did you mean when you said you were glad that I was coming?"

"Only——" Mohammed looked down at his glass, then up again with an expression of apparent candour. "You



have a reputation, Mr. Denny, that extended far beyond your old district of Mangayo." Denny felt himself flushing. The impudence, the bloody impudence! "What I mean is, you have got yourself a name, rightly or wrongly, for a certain tolerance."

"Tolerance?"

"Towards the natives."

"If you mean that I have tried to understand their problems. . . ."

"That's exactly what I do mean." He leaned forward, his fat thighs pressing against the chair. "Here in Banare I can feel the pulse of the whole district, even better, I dare say, than your own intelligence officers. I know what the natives are saying."

"What *are* they saying?"

"They are saying that there is a new D.C. come to rule them, a man who is fair to the blacks—some say he even puts them before his own people. If this man is one half as good as they say, it will be a time of hope, a new hope for this most unhappy district."

Denny asked, "Why—even supposing you believe all this bull—should *you* be pleased? You're not a native."

"You are right, Mr. Denny. In spite of this, my store, my—comparative—wealth, I am even less than the native. The native has some right. The Syrian trader none."

Denny looked sardonically at the signs of comfort, the Indian carpet, the hardwood chairs and desk, the chaise-longue under the window. "You don't want my sympathy."

"I am only stating facts."

Outside in the yard a lorry was being unloaded, the clatter of metal, the dumping of heavy boxes, and free laughter of the porters. Mohammed went over to the window and leaned across the chaise-longue, looking out. Angrily, he rapped on the window and shouted an order in Ki'Swahili. As he came back to his chair by the table he made an unexpected gesture of tolerance. "Just children, you see? You understand that?"

"Yes."

Mohammed reached restlessly for the bottle. "More whisky?"

"Thanks."

"The trouble is," Mohammed said, "to make your people remember that. A few years ago—on the surface—there was no trouble. The white man was master and the native tribes, even the Kikuyu, knew their place. Even now, the majority of these people, if they had their choice, would return to the old times."

"At least they knew where they were."

"Exactly. The world was settled for them, and they were fairly content."

"Until a few of them learnt to read the Bible and hear about politics."

"Ah!" Mohammed gestured with his glass. "There, of course, was the danger. Now—the wretched Kikuyu, whatever his beliefs, must suffer. I am thinking of those men outside, my porters. Obviously they have no grievance. They are well paid, and yet—they are Kikuyu. They are suspect."

"They can prove their loyalty."

"How can they do that?"

"Well—they could join the Home Guard."

"Yes, and then do you know what they think? They see that the white man is here now and that while he is here they will be comparatively safe. But supposing the white man leaves."

"We shan't leave."

"No, but it might happen. You must admit—it has happened elsewhere. Supposing the Mau Mau get so strong that the European farmer says. Enough, I'm getting out. What then of your loyal Home Guard?"

"I don't know. Presumably they'd be protected."

"By whom?"

"Well—by the agreement with the new—I suppose you mean, native, parliament." He put down his glass and said

impatiently, "But all this is just talk. There's no question of our leaving Kenya."

Mohammed said, "It would be a relief to the loyal Kikuyu to be so sure. They see other countries where a few years ago it would have seemed impossible that the British might leave, and they think to themselves what will happen then, if you do go. The white man's memory is short, but the native does not forget. What happens when those men you call gangsters, hiding now in the forests, become the legal rulers of the country?"

"It can't happen," Denny said uneasily, but he was glad to push back his chair and walk away from the conversation. "Let's see some of this material." But Mohammed beat him to the door. He said, "I have mentioned this to you, Mr. Denny, because the men I employ, the men who will be bringing material to your road, men driving my lorries, will be Kikuyu. If you can't trust them as I trust them, the road will never be finished. Obviously the Mau Mau are going to stop your work if they can. There will be raids, probably some killings. I should like to be sure that your police won't arrest the only Kikuyu in reach—my workmen."

Denny looked at him for a minute before replying. There was something about Mohammed . . . so honest and so untrustworthy, so tolerant and so cruel. Denny felt vaguely confused. He said, "The road must be finished—and quickly. That will be my only consideration. How I set about it will be my business."

"Of course," Mohammed inclined his Roman head, with an oddly unconvincing gesture of humility. "I wouldn't have mentioned this if your reputation for understanding had not travelled before you."

Outside in the outer office Palethorpe was talking to the Goanese clerk. He came forward eagerly, and then hesitated. He flushed as he asked, "Mohammed, I wonder if I could have a word with you?"

## CHAPTER NINE

THE RECONNAISSANCE OF THE ROAD turned out to be more difficult than he had expected. From the large-scale map in his district office he had been able to trace the most feasible route, but when he stood on the plain beside Flamingo Lake he could see that although the huge cleft he had noted was in fact the only way up the escarpment the approach to it was much harder than he had judged. There was a line of acacia trees following the course of a dried-up stream from Venner's Gorge to the stony foothills, and he decided to follow this if possible, remembering the merciless heat, and the need for many long safaris.

Next day at sunrise he started with Ali, a police detachment of four in charge of a corporal, and six Kikuyu porters. Although he only intended to be away a few days, there were four full bottles of whisky in his kit. Food they could get from the country, and there would be contributions from the headman of the locations through which they must pass.

The lorry in which they travelled to the gorge was churning back, empty, before the sun had fully risen, and the dew was heavy on a million spiders' webs in the tufty grass as they climbed from the track over the loose shale. The air was clean and cold, and the mountain rose before them to the sky like a seemingly insurmountable wall. This was the time of day that Denny loved best, before the sun could begin its torture, before the dew had dried from the settling dust. There was a short period, an hour at the most, when the face of Africa was cool and friendly and beautiful.

The procession, he noticed, was strangely bunched together and quiet. There was no need for Corporal Lamissah, in charge of the safari, to harass the stragglers. There were none. Stopping for a rest at the top of a rise, Denny saw the solid phalanx of black men only a few yards behind, the porters breathing heavily but not relinquishing

their loads, the policemen carrying their rifles at the ready. And strangest of all was the silence as they stopped, eyes rolling to the whites, bodies alert, waiting, listening. They carried fear like an extra load and he guessed that when danger came it would be the tangible load, the tents and equipment, they would drop.

"Corporal Lamissah!"

"Bwana?"

"Tell the men to spread out a bit. If we are attacked, they'll get the lot of us with one burst."

"Yes, bwana." The corporal hesitated. "The porters afraid, sah. They think to leave bwana means Mau Mau come get."

"Then post two of your men with rifles at the back."

"Yes, bwana." He saw as the corporal turned reluctantly away the quick envious glances towards the tommy gun. That was it. The real safety, as they saw with childish directness, lay not in the white man or in his office or the law he represented. Safety lay in fire power. Would there ever be, he wondered, a return to the Africa he loved, the black man living happily with his few well-tilled shambas, his goats and, if he were lucky, his herd of tick-ridden cattle? Would the native ever accept the white man again as an employer, a stern but not unkindly overseer, or at the worst as a necessary evil? For twenty years he had been part of this easy relationship which now looked as though it might be broken for ever.

Farther up the hillside they disturbed a flock of guinea-fowl and when he picked two off with his revolver, the spirits of his entourage brightened visibly. The porters squealed amongst themselves and chattered excitedly as a policeman came back holding the two birds aloft like flags of victory. It was, he realised, the best thing he could have done. To have a white man who was a marksman gave prestige as well as safety. By their simple standards the power to kill quickly and without fumbling was the most important attribute of all.

After an hour's climb they reached the top of the first hill, where the trees and the watercourse they had been following turned south, almost parallel with the line of escarpment, and it was plain that the road must make its own way from here across the inhospitable foothills. Through his glasses Denny could see the entrance to the big ravine and the dark green of vegetation which lined its surface. Was there water? If he continued with all his porters they might find after they had toiled through the worst heat of the day that there was no suitable place for an encampment. Here at least, he found, was a trickle of water, and the roar of Venner's Gorge, which was barely an hour's march away, could still be heard. Also, he found on the other side of the trees a fair-sized village. A score of thatched roofs showed above the protective thorn palisade, and cattle were lowing somewhere down the hill.

The presence of the safari was noticed almost at once. A boy resting on a mound—as a look-out?—shouted a warning. A signal was given—a cow-bell rattling—and spears of running moran showed like dancing puppets above the thorn. There was a period of waiting.

“What are they afraid of?” said Denny. “Do we look like the bloody Mau Mau?” He was feeling hot and irritable and, worst of all, thirsty. Through a narrow gateway in the palisade a few warriors came slowly, spears reflecting dully in the sun, bare feet treading delicately through the dust. Obviously they feared a trap. For a few moments they stood watching silently and then they parted to admit an old man through their ranks. The headman.

Slowly, the village deputation crossed the stony ground. Although it must have been plain to them from Denny's helmet and badge that he was a Government official, they still lacked assurance, and there was a noticeable reluctance of the young moran to follow close to their leader. Like two deputations meeting in no-man's-land, the natives watched each other in silence. Only when they were both in the meagre shadow of the trees did the village party halt.

"Jambo, bwana."

"Jambo."

"What news?"

"Good news."

Denny asked irritably, "What village is this? And who is the headman?"

The old man said, "This is Lubungu village, bwana, and I, arap Maru, am the headman. I bring you greetings."

"What location?" It was a bad sign that he had forgotten. Whatever shortcomings were attributed to him by his superiors, sitting comfortably in their air-conditioned offices in Nairobi, no one could say that he had failed to care for his district. In bed last night, with the hyenas crying in the hills and the moths beating against the window gauze, he had learnt by heart the locations of his district, the names of the councillors and the staff of his District Headquarters. Now this morning he had forgotten, and it was like a symptom of deterioration. "What location?"

"Arap Maru location, bwana. I am the headman."

"Of course." He squinted at the old dignified face, the frail shoulders, supporting on one side the tribal toga. He asked, "Do you know who I am?"

"You are the new D.C., bwana."

"That's right." He looked round at the warriors, fine young men with ochred hair and oiled skin. Their broad spears, held erect, glittered with menace, and the arm muscles were as smooth as carved ebony. He asked, "Have you been troubled here by the Mau Mau?"

At once, as he mentioned the name, the impression of virile strength disintegrated. The warriors shuffled uneasily, cast down their eyes, and the old man, their leader, gave out a sigh. "Once, bwana: at night."

"What happened?"

The old man shrugged. "What always happens? The fence of the boma was broken, some of our best cattle were taken."

"Didn't you fight?"

There was an appreciable pause before the old man answered. He half-turned towards his warriors and then, receiving no encouragement, replied without looking at Denny, "They came silently, bwana, like ghosts in the night. The village was sleeping."

"Was there no headman on watch?"

"Yes, bwana."

"What happened to him?"

"Next morning he was gone."

"Could he have been of the Mau Mau?"

"Perhaps. There is no one, not even a headman, who can tell when a man has been forced to take the oath. Even his own father would not know."

"But if a man is forced does he still think the oath is binding?"

The old man quoted, " 'If I am told to kill a white man, I will go out by day or night, clothed or unclothed, in sickness or in health, and if I break this oath may I die.' "

Denny said impatiently, "Listen carefully, arap Maru, for I say to you that an oath that is taken at the point of a spear is no oath at all. If there are men of this location who have taken such an oath they must come to me and I will receive them as foolish sons who are to be forgiven."

The old man said, "To be forgiven, bwana, is one thing, to die for the broken oath is another."

"No one will die," Denny shouted, feeling his patience melt in the grilling heat and the dazzling glare of the stones. Then, conscientiously he strove for calmness. You couldn't fight age-old superstitions with anger. He said, "You must send word round your location that the new D.C. bwana has come to beat the Mau Mau. If a man has taken the oath he must confess now and be cleansed. Later I shall not be so forgiving. If a man is caught in friendship with the Mau Mau—well, you know the punishment."

A movement of unrest ran round the half-circle of warriors. Ankle bells rattled and spear shafts stirred in the dusk. The headman said, "May I tell you, bwana, what my



people will say? They will say, These are fine words, arap Maru, fine words if we could believe. But how will the D.C. bwana beat the Mau Mau, how will he help us when we are attacked?"

"Then you must tell them that how I will beat the Mau Mau is my affair, but as to how I shall help them when they are attacked. . ." He turned and waved his arm to indicate the sweeping rise of the hill. "You can tell them that a road will be built—up here—there," indicating the deep ravine, "and so to the very edge of the forest. On this road I and my police will come in fast lorries. From Manake the English soldiers will climb as thick as flies up the hill and the Mau Mau will be driven higher and higher into the forests until they surrender or starve." He turned away with studied nonchalance, allowing his boast to settle in their minds. He saw Corporal Lamissah watching him with respect and the native policemen leaning on their rifles.

"Bwana."

He turned to receive the inevitable objection. "If this road is to be built as you say, then truly we might be safe, but . . ." He held his hands out from his sides.

"But what?"

"We are many leagues from Manake. How long will it take to bring material for the road and prisoners to labour? In two, three summers the road may reach this place where we are standing, a child will be grown to puberty before you reach Kilavo Ravine and to manhood before you climb the escarpment." He looked uncertainly at the D.C. and, receiving no reply, went on, "The road will be a safety when it is finished, but the Mau Mau are threatening us now."

The sharp daggers of sunlight were thrusting through the foliage to the spot where Denny was standing. He felt them on his neck, on his bare forearms, on the cold sweat-soaked shirt. The cruel light reflecting from the open land beyond the trees slashed at his eyes and his nerves. The village, two hundred yards away, was lost in the furnace glare. For a moment Denny closed his eyes and was aware of the thump-

thump of his heart. He thought, I'm going to be ill. But above his feeling of nausea, or perhaps out of it, came a single-minded resolve, stronger than anything he had felt in twenty years. The road would be made. Whatever the obstacles—and he was clear-sighted enough to realise that they must often appear insurmountable—the red laterite surface would be driven to the point indicated by the Provincial Commissioner. These barren foothills, the sheer escarpment, the rolling jungle-touched highlands. No man could have accepted lightly such a stupendous task. But the road must be made, and, if it was to serve its purpose, it must be laid quickly. Denny knew that he would do it.

He opened his eyes and made to pass a hand on his throbbing forehead. But he said firmly enough, "Arap Maru, I hear these difficulties and I understand them, but I tell you surely that this road will be built. As soon as I have seen the land, as I am about to do, I shall have more workmen here than you would have thought possible. Here you must help me, arap Maru, for you understand that the road will be for your safety as well as others? I shall need your young men to work. I will pay them Government wages according to their skill. The road will come up here, and there," indicating the ravine, "and before another summer has passed it will be a full day's march away, where the jungle starts on the mountain."

He stared with sick, fanatic eyes at the old man and the strangely subdued warriors. The landscape was shining indistinctly as in a vision. Vultures hovered in the merciless sky. He said, "Remember well what I have said, for I tell you surely that this will happen."

## CHAPTER TEN

THEY CAMPED THAT NIGHT in Kilavo Ravine, and in the morning one of the porters had been killed. It was still only half-light when Denny awoke. He sat up sharply, feeling for his revolver, as he heard the hoarse cry of the man who found the body. In a minute the whole camp was awake. Above the shrill chatter Denny could hear the calmer voice of authority—Corporal Lamissah. He rose unsteadily to his feet, feeling the tent heavy with dew where his forehead touched, but when he stumbled to the end of his camp-bed he knew that he was in for a dose of fever. His forehead was burning and his throat parched.

He called sharply, "Ali!" and at once the chattering subsided. He shouted again, "Ali!"

"Bwana?" So Ali had been asleep too.

"Get me some drinking water." He couldn't stomach the thought of whisky.

Outside in the grey dawn the steep wooded slopes of the ravine leant against a pale sky. Down in the valley a light showed—Lubungu village? The sharpness of dawn sobered Denny's brain, and he walked carefully across the clearing, where the camp fire was still burning, to a cluster of bushes, twenty yards away. The frightened group parted as he approached.

"Corporal Lamissah!"

"Bwana?"

"What's happened?"

"One of the porters, bwana—Temli. Speared as he slept."

"Dead?"

"Yes, bwana "

Denny shone his torch on the hideous mask of pain, teeth bared, eyes protruding like marbles. He bent down and touched the smooth arm—warm, almost cold. He asked sharply, "Anyone else?"

"No, bwana. At least——"

"Check up at once and let me know."

He turned away, glad of the darkness which hid his face. To another man the death of a native porter would not have seemed so terrible. Lucien, he could imagine, would have given his mirthless grin and have forgotten about it before he crossed the clearing. But to Denny this was murder, as tragic as the slaying of any white farmer. It meant that he must take arms against the people he loved, and in the welter of pursuit and punishment innocent men, caught up in an argument they didn't understand, would suffer. He staggered into his tent and sat on the edge of his camp-bed with fingers pressed against his temple.

"Water, bwana."

"What?" He raised his throbbing head and looked stupidly at Ali. "What? Oh yes——" As he grasped the mug, water slopped on to his bare knees. He drank greedily.

"Bwana plenty fever. Bwana lie down."

"No—I'll be all right."

But Ali ignored him, like a mother with a sick child. Denny felt himself being pushed gently back on to the canvas bed. While his brain still tried to settle on words of protest the cool pillow received his aching head. "Must get going. . . ." He made a feeble effort to rise, but sank back with a sigh before Ali's restraining hand. "Bwana sleep."

It was afternoon when he woke, and he could tell that the fever was still on him. But his eyes focused correctly on the tent wall, the line of the pole and the triangle of pure blue outside. A subdued chattering told him that the porters were by the camp fire. He called in a croaking voice "Ali!" The chattering stopped, but there was no movement towards his tent.

Painfully he swung his legs clear of the bed and sat with the wooden support cutting his thighs as his head cleared. There was a mug of water covered by a handkerchief and his shaving kit, soap, razor, brush, spread neatly on the canvas chair. He called again, "Ali!"

As he came out into the torturing sunlight, grasping the tent flaps for support, he saw Corporal Lamissah coming briskly across the clearing.

"What's happened, Corporal? Where the hell is Ali?"

"Ali gone back to Kanye, bwana."

"To Kanye? What for?"

"To fetch Mr. Lucien."

"What the——!" Denny made a weary gesture with his hand. He wasn't fit enough to argue. "Why should he do that?"

"When Mau Mau killing, bwana, Mr. Lucien always send patrol."

"Yes, of course, only now—by the time they get here——" He shut his eyes to the sun glare. "Why should Ali go? Wouldn't your police have got there more quickly? After all, this is their country."

"They . . ." Corporal Lamissah hesitated, and Denny guessed that he was thinking of a way round the fact that the police were too scared to make the long journey on foot. "Ali want to go. He get medicine for bwana."

He could well believe that it was true. In his stubborn loyalty Ali had done more dangerous things than this—the lion rush at Nasama and the nightmare hunting of a madman in the Njiri forest. Nothi that Ali did could surprise him now, but he was always secretly pleased by his loyalty. Ali was Africa. Ali was the native. For a long time he had come to accept his virtues as the virtues of all the native peoples.

He asked, "How long has he been gone?"

"Three, four hours, bwana."

"Did he go alone?"

"Yes."

"Will he get there safely?"

The corporal hesitated. "He had a rifle, bwana."

A rifle! Could one man fight his way clear of an ambush? Denny said, "You should have sent a policeman as escort."

Round the fire, like a cluster of frightened animals, the

porters huddled together. Fear had muted their exuberance, so that they watched with faint hope as Denny walked painfully across the grass. Despite the sun, which lay like a shimmering blanket on the mountain-side, they had made no move towards the shadows of the cedar trees only a hundred yards away, or to rig up some form of shelter nearer the fire. The very threat of Mau Mau, as he was beginning to realise, was like a paralysis. It was this he had to fight.

He went over to the spot where the dead man had lain, but now there was only a long mound of fresh earth. "So you've buried him?"

"Yes, bwana."

"That's good." He wanted the corporal to know that this at least had been correctly handled, and that he understood how custom had been subdued to duty. The native preferred his body to be left to the vultures and the jackals. Only the white man wanted to cover it and leave it mouldering in a grave.

Denny asked, "This was the only man attacked?"

"Yes, bwana."

"Where were the sentries?"

"Over there, bwana," indicating the tent.

"But they didn't stay there? Where was their beat?"

"Across here, bwana, to the cedar trees, and round the edge of the camp."

"And they heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

Denny said, "I can't understand why only one man was killed when there were others lying within a few yards."

"Perhaps the moran was surprised, bwana. Perhaps he heard the sentries."

"I expect so." He felt too ill to think and yet, impatiently, he wanted to move on. Above the pain was the nagging resolve he had made yesterday. The road must go on. He looked down the bare hillsides to the distant village of Lubungu, and the line of acacia trees, but the valley road was hidden over a shoulder of the hill.

"How long will it take Ali to reach Kanye?"

The corporal considered. "Five hours, perhaps. That is . . ."

"If he's not attacked." Denny walked restlessly back towards his tent. "That means that he's not there yet, perhaps only half-way. By the time Mr. Lucien organises a patrol and gets to Venner's Gorge by lorry, it will be almost dusk." He calculated, "They'll be lucky to get here before dark."

The corporal said respectfully, "Mr. Lucien know this district, bwana. Perhaps he leave it till tomorrow."

"Perhaps. That's what I'm afraid of. I mean . . . sitting here, doing nothing." Time, he realised, was the enemy. If the road was to be finished before the rains came. . . . He looked up the sombre gorge, the thickly-wooded slopes, the shelving heights of the mountain. A few vultures hovered in the still air. He couldn't even be sure that a road was a feasible proposition. What secrets, what hidden obstacles lay behind those rising forests?

With a sudden resolve Denny reached inside the tent for his revolver belt and cartridges. "See if you can get me a volunteer," he said, "I'm going to climb the ravine."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

IF HIS JUDGMENT had not been distorted by fever he would not have considered making the reconnaissance alone. Waiting in the hot oven of his tent he could hear Corporal Lamissah haranguing the police, the falsetto voice playing through the whole gamut of persuasion, threats, scorn, soft-toned promises, but he knew as he listened for the grunted replies that no one would volunteer and that he would have to go up the ravine alone. It was an obsession now—the road: the road: the road. Its red looping bends rose through his fevered imagination like the pathway to fulfilment. All his life he had been dogged by single-mindedness, which in others was considered a virtue. This was something he had never understood. His father, the demi-god, killed in a fall from his mistress's window; a drunken accident or suicide? But the man was still a hero to his son. The girl Felicity, his second obsession. For her he would have become Provincial Commissioner, Governor, anything. But she turned him down when a middle-aged baronet came out from England. And then, naturally, to the third obsession—whisky.

Now there was the road. He fumbled in his haversack for mepacrine tablets and, when he found the bottle, opened it so clumsily that he spilt half of them on the ground, where they lay like yellow seed among the stones. He stopped to pick them up, but the effort was too much and he was glad to hold on to the tent post for support.

"Bwana."

"What is it?" He turned wearily, trying to focus the lines of Corporal Lamissah's troubled face.

"The men not wanting to go, bwana."

"What's the matter? Are they afraid?"

"Yes, bwana."

"Well, dammit all, someone'll have to come. Didn't you detail somebody?"



"Bwana ask for volunteer."

"A volunteer? Did I?" He couldn't remember. In his sickness he felt too tired to argue, and in a way he wasn't sorry that the native policemen were too frightened to accompany him. All he wanted was to stumble quietly away into the cool fastnesses of the ravine. Later on, today, tomorrow, someone was coming, a younger man, keen, efficient, a mirthless smile. . . . What was his name?—Lucifer? Stanhope? No, that was the girl's brother. He pushed past the corporal and looked out at the merciless light. "How much longer to dusk, Corporal?"

"Two, three hours, bwana."

"All right." He clenched his teeth and started up the steep rise towards the trees.

"Bwana!"

"Yes? What is it?" He wouldn't stop, and the corporal had to trot beside him as he complained, "Bwana not go alone?"

"Why not?"

"But, bwana . . ."

"If your men are so bloody well scared I'll have to do it myself."

"No, bwana." Silence for a few steps and then the dragged-out offer, "I corr with bwana."

"You will?" Denny stopped with difficulty. The flush of fever was creeping up his neck and face, and yet he could feel himself shivering.

"Bwana not go alone."

For a moment Denny stood considering in the burning glare. On one side, only a hundred yards away, was the edge of the wooded slopes: on the other lay the encampment, the tent with his towel hanging limply on the guy-line, the circle of wood-ash with the crouching police and porters. They reminded him of rabbits, hypnotised by a stoat. He said, "Thanks, Corporal, I won't forget you were willing to come. But you'd better stay here—take charge."

Then, leaning forward against the slope, with eyes closed,

heart beating madly, he struck out doggedly for the trees.

Still walking blindly, he felt, from the sudden coolness, when he had crossed the margin between torture and relief. He opened his eyes. Ahead the immediate slope was too precipitous to climb and he clambered uncomfortably round the side of the broad shoulder of the hill until he came to the deep V of the ravine. Here in the magical half-light beneath the trees he could progress more easily, although he still found himself stumbling repeatedly. There was the line of a watercourse, the river he had noted on the map, which apparently only flowed when the rains came. Young saplings were growing so profusely in the dry mud that it was easier to walk farther up the slopes. He saw that the river would be a real obstacle if it were necessary to wind backwards and forwards up the ravine. Each crossing would have to be bridged.

Farther up the hill he came on a sudden cliff of rock rising through the trees and he wasted a reserve of tortured energy trying to find a way round. His senses were blurred now, and he found himself clambering aimlessly, sometimes uphill, sometimes down, as determination probed for the easiest route. In his imagination the rough wall of rock, touched here and there with lichen and brilliant flowers, was the wall of a prison, barring him from fulfilment. He had to surmount it. Uphill, uphill, slipping, sliding on the loose stones, clinging to the rough bark of trees, lying face downwards in the dust, with the mysterious forest noises sighing above him like a dirge. Downhill again, falling from tree to tree until suddenly there was a clear drop which his fuddled senses were too slow to perceive. He slipped and fell, a second or two in mid-air with the diaphragm cleaving upwards, a sharp stabbing pain as his body struck farther down the slope, then the dizzy, swirling descent until he finished face downwards in the river bed.

For a long time he lay there without moving. In the surging fantasy of fever, there was a warmth and comfort that were irresistible. With each breath he could feel the

pain of his body, but it was no more than a pin-prick in the blessed relief. Daylight was fading. Already the clustered saplings where he lay were merging into a fence of darkness, and the trees on the other side of the ravine were indistinguishable against the hill. There were vague skitterings and movements in the undergrowth, stealthy jungle noises which he heard even above his own heavy breathing. He could feel no fear and little discomfort. It was like the stupor of drunkenness, only without the exhilaration. Somewhere up the mountain a lion roared and the jackals howled to the night.

When he awoke next morning he was cold and miserably ill. All the comfort of his fever had gone and every bone and muscle in his body was full of pain. His clothes were soaked with dew, there was a scar of dried blood across his forehead and his left arm ached abominably in whatever position he tried to hold it.

He struggled weakly to his knees. Trees, sky, cliff edge, see-sawed through perspective until he bent his head to vomit. He felt in vain for his whisky flask. An animal, disturbed by his movement, fled through the undergrowth. God, if he were attacked now! Painfully he reached for his holster: buttoned, and the revolver still there. At least he was not quite defenceless. The small ember of comfort glowed through his desolation. Summoning all his resolve he lurched to his feet. The blood tingled through his numbed legs, ice-cold feet chafed against the boots. Warily he staggered a few steps along the river bed.

His progress was slow at first, each step being an exercise in resolve, but as the blood moved through his body, and warmth, he knew that he could keep going until he reached safety.

It wasn't until he had climbed round the base of the cliff which had troubled him so much yesterday that he realised that he was climbing away from the camp. Already he was far up the ravine, and although in the hazy distance above

the tree-tops he could see right across the Rift, the lower slopes of this eastern escarpment were hidden by the forests. How far was he from the camp? Of the previous evening he could remember only his prodigious efforts to circle the cliff, and now, having achieved that object, he felt loth to retrace his steps. From the point where he was standing he could look upwards to the sky above a false crest. If that were the top of the escarpment the White Highlands could not be far beyond. The Stanhope farm, the bearing of which from the top of the ravine was so clear in his memory, attracted him upwards rather than back to the encampment. Down there was responsibility, a group of frightened natives, the unbearable Lucien. Ahead was the Stanhope girl and sympathy. He didn't consider it like that in his judgment, but instinctively, like a sick child, he turned towards the woman.

He found as he struggled higher and higher up the mountain that the crest was much farther away than he had imagined. On and on and on he felt the old fever returning, and with it hallucination, so that he seemed to be pitting his weak efforts to an impossible task. His body was burning with pain. His mouth was dry and foul-tasting. And always he argued to himself, it can't be much farther, it can't be much farther, as though by repeating it often enough he could stir up the last reserves of energy to reach the summit of the hill.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

HE WAS NOT SURPRISED to find himself in the girl's arms. Dreams, reality; waking, sleeping: he had given up trying to distinguish one from the rest. Her brother's voice pierced the haze, "Probably blind drunk. Why should we worry?" And the girl's quick defence, "He's not. You've only to touch his forehead. You can tell he's ill."

A horse stamped and sneezed, and a rock scuttled down the hillside. Denny lay at peace, with eyes closed, and felt her fingers resting on his stubble of beard. He felt unbearably tired. If he opened his eyes recognition would come, explanations demanding thought. Obviously he would have to move. But not yet. All he wanted was to lie there supported by her arm, with his head resting on her knee.

"What had we better do?"

Reluctantly Ian's voice said, "I suppose we'll have to hump him across one of the horses. Where do you suppose we should take him?"

"Home, of course. Where else?"

"Mother's not going to like it."

"I can't help that. Besides, she will when she knows what he's doing."

"You mean the road?"

Barbara said worriedly, "If only we had the car. He's obviously ill. I don't know . . ."

"I'll stay here if you like while you ride home."

"It wouldn't take long. Besides . . ." With sudden determination she said, "You go, Ian. I'll stay here."

The boy's voice, doubtfully: "Will you be all right?"

"Of course. And I've got my gun." Denny felt her probing under his back for her revolver holster. "Go along with you"

"All right, I'll be as quick as I can." As the stirrup

leather creaked he added, "Hope I can get the damned floozie to start."

When the hoof-beats were only a muffled throbbing in the hill Denny opened his eyes. She wasn't looking at him at all, and he could see from the nervous movements of her head, the alert eyes, that she was desperately afraid. There wasn't anything above except the curve of her throat, the angle of her jaw, backed by the infinite depth of sky. So he was clear of the ravine. He had half-expected a canopy of trees or at least a shadow of scrub, but there was nothing. Unconsciously her fingers caressed his forehead: comfort and sympathy. In his weakness they seemed unbearably touching as though after the long abstinence, from childhood to maturity, the deep well of loneliness, he could feel them with a virgin mind. If this were love, how wrong he had been all these years! Habbasiyah whose young black body had given him warmth and satisfaction. The other casual lovers whose names and faces he could hardly remember. Until now he had been satisfied. Yet it seemed not only reasonable but necessary to forgo all that for the plain, earnest face he saw above him: a freckled forehead beaded with sweat.

"Don't be afraid."

She looked at him, startled and pleased. "So you're awake."

"Yes." He sat up painfully, holding a hand to his forehead. "Though where I've been . . ."

She said, "We found you lying here on the grass. At first I thought . . ."

"Yes?"

"I thought you'd been killed. I thought *they* had got you."

"No." He tried to clear his thoughts. "Someone was killed, though—a porter. It must be . . ." He asked, "What day is it?"

"Wednesday."

"And I started out on Monday—I think. I must have

left the camp that evening—no, on Tuesday evening. The porter was killed Monday night.”

“Where is the camp?”

“Kilavo Ravine.” He looked round. “I must have climbed up here, although I don’t remember the half of it. How far is the ravine?”

“The top of it is two, three miles down the hill.” She pointed over the low scrub which was dotted here and there with trees, a few euphorbia. Almost hidden in a fold of the slope were some thatched huts, but there was no sign of smoke or movement of cattle and children. She said, following his gaze, “A ‘Kuke’ village—deserted now.”

“Sickness?”

“They’ve been sent to the reserve. Most of the villagers on this part of the highlands.”

For a moment he remembered the hard black-and-white feud and he was saddened that she spoke with such rancour. He could fight the Kikuyu, fear them even: but he couldn’t hate them. He said, “I shouldn’t have left the camp, I suppose, knowing that I was in for another dose of malaria.”

“Why did you do it?”

“I don’t know.” He moved uneasily. “This road must be built. I can’t stop—even for a day. If I can get it to the top of the ravine before the rains come.”

“You’ll never do it.”

He looked at her with burning eyes. “I must do it.”

She turned her head away in confusion, and he saw, with surprise, that in profile she was almost beautiful. Her forehead and nose were good and the chin was firm. Only the fullness of her mouth and the way she did her hair made her plain. Leaning backwards, her body pressed its outline against her thin blouse. He said thickly, “We’d better be going.” He would have scrambled to his knees if she had not put a restraining arm on his shoulder.

“No. You must stay here. Ian won’t be long.”

She was too close to him for comfort, her hair brushing his face and her nearer shoulder bearing on his. He said,

almost in panic, "I'm all right now. If you know malaria . . ."

"You must be patient. We'll take you home. Mother will know what to do."

"What time of day is it?"

"Six o'clock. In an hour or two it will be dark. You couldn't do anything."

He said weakly, "Lucien will be looking for me."

"We'll send a message down."

"Can you do that?"

"There's a phone—if the wire's not been cut."

He relaxed, surrendering to the inevitable. She looked at him and smiled, confidently at first, and then, as she read his expression, with a painful intensity. She flushed and then turned so pale that he thought she was going to faint. He could feel her shivering as he put one arm round her shoulders and drew her lips to his.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE LIVING-ROOM, as he had expected, was hideously uncomfortable. Advancing carefully between the straight-backed chairs, the plain table with a wooden cover, a Bible, and, incongruously, a revolver, he felt like a new votary of some austere religion, and, indeed, with an open Bible on her knees and her free hand resting on the handle of an invalid stick, Mrs. Stanhope looked as implacable as a goddess. On the wall above her head was a text: *The Wages Of Sin Is Death*. She did not smile or move her position as Barbara explained nervously, "Mother, this is Mr. Denny, our new D.C."

"Indeed!"

"He has been very ill. We found him on the lower pastures and so we thought——"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry to be so much trouble," Denny said. "I had a dose of fever, it's true, but it's over now. I'm quite fit to go back."

The old lady said, "I'm sure you know best, Mr. Denny."

The girl came quickly round and grasped the blue-veined, skeleton hand, "Mother, . . . can't let Mr. Denny go tonight. He *says* he's fit, but you know," she glanced up at her lover with a shy secret smile, "you know what it's like to come out of a bad attack of malaria."

It was true. Despite his elation, the warm comfort of her flushed face, Denny felt the heavy after-depression of fever. Doubts troubled him, like digestion after a bout of drinking: although he wanted the girl, the thought that always at her back would be this room, this mother, cast a shadow of uncertainty. But the boy Ian came unexpected as an ally. "Of course we can't let him go, Mother."

"I don't see . . ."

"It's almost dark. I don't know who's going to drive

down the track in our old Lizzie, but I hope it's not going to be me."

"If you can lend me a horse . . ." Denny began. He could feel resentment creeping up his neck.

"You certainly can't ride down," Ian said, "even if you were fit."

"Why not?"

"You'd never find your way in the first place. It's a devil of a road." He made a gesture of apology. "Sorry, Mother. The surface is bad, there's a sheer drop on one side most of the way, and . . ." he hesitated.

"Yes?"

"That's where poor Baker was killed."

"Yes. I'd forgotten." Denny stared angrily at the old lady, uncomfortable to find himself in this position, and yet wanting for Barbara's sake to pass it off as graciously as possible.

Perhaps Mrs. Stanhope caught something of his anger, for her eyes held a glint of amusement as she said, "Well, Mr. Denny, it seems that you've no choice. We shall be glad to put you up for the night."

He made a stiff little bow. "Thank you."

"Ian can show you the guest-room. I expect you'd like a bath—unless you'd sooner go straight to bed."

"I'm quite well now," Denny said. He wasn't going to confess his weakness to this relentless woman.

When he came down an hour later, he felt quite refreshed, although he still had a headache and his tongue was desperate for a drink. From what Lucien and Palethorpe had told him, he knew that he wouldn't get anything stronger than coffee. Perhaps if he tried the kitchen. . . . Desire was stronger than caution. If they found him wandering about the house he could pretend he had lost his way. He turned along the dark passage.

Whisky, gin; even a swig of native 'fire-water' would have been acceptable at that moment. There was a door of wire gauze at the end of the passage, and he could hear kitchen

sounds, the clink of a spoon against saucepan, the sharpening of a knife. He went boldly in.

They all looked at him in surprise: the native cook, the Kikuyu houseboy—and Barbara.

"Why, how did you find your way in here?" She smiled at him so gladly that he was ashamed.

"I was looking for you."

She took his arm. "I was just seeing about the dinner. But I've finished now. Come along, and I'll take you back to the others." She asked, "Do you feel well enough to stay up for dinner?"

"Of course." He held the door open and followed her into the dark intimacy of the passage. She said, "I forgot to tell you. Daddy's home. I wanted you to meet him."

He made no reply and, as they reached the turn of the passage, she turned and clasped her arms round his waist. With her head buried against his shoulder she said, "Oh, darling, darling, I've been waiting, praying for you to come down."

"I'm sorry I was so long."

"Oh, it's not that. It's only that I—can't believe even now that it can be true."

"That I love you?" Sincerity gave dignity to the words, so that he could say them without embarrassment. He rested a hand on her head. "You don't know. . . . Our lives are so different. I can't help wondering whether—well, whether I've told you any of the things I should about myself."

"And about me? Do you think that I haven't got my guilty secrets too?"

"Oh, they're not secrets." He blundered through the tangle of resentment and hidden conscience. "You've probably heard . . . my reputation seems to have arrived before me."

She said passionately, "I don't care about your reputation. What does it matter if a lot of narrow-minded, backbiting farmers with nothing better to do like to amuse themselves with cruel gossip?"

"Some of it may be true."

"I don't care."

"It's true, for instance, that I drink." In the sudden silence he was conscious of a quickening heartbeat, an apprehension, and yet a gladness that he had had the courage to make the challenge. In the kitchen, plates were being wiped, a native voice threw out a few bars of song. Mrs. Stanhope's voice came angrily from the living-room.

Barbara looked up at him, and, with the features softened by the half-light, her face looked beautiful and trusting. She said, "I've heard about that, of course. That's the sort of thing they like to tell—while they are drinking themselves stupid in the bars at Manake. But you—" she hesitated, searching for an excuse, "you have a hard life, a dangerous life, if it's a sin for you to drink . . ." She said impetuously, "You'd like a drink now, I know—if only we had something. . . . I want you to know how I feel."

He waited hopefully, while she considered.

"There's nothing I can give you. Mother doesn't allow. . . ." She said, "There's some sherry we use for cooking. There's a whole bottle in the kitchen. If I could get you that. . . ."

She was like a young girl in her anxiety to please, and suddenly he was ashamed. "No, no. You'll only make trouble for yourself. Besides," he grinned, "it will do me good to wait."

Entering the living-room again he felt the tension arising from the old woman's hostility. She glared at him and then at her husband, who was standing before her like a discredited courtier. She waved her stick impatiently, and said to Denny, "So you've decided to stay up? Perhaps your malaria wasn't so bad after all."

"I've lost one whole day," Denny said, "and ruined a suit of khaki drill. Otherwise I'm all right."

She said perversely, "You don't look well, but then—I don't know how you appear when you're fit."

Denny returned her glare. His head was aching abomin-

ably and he couldn't forget the bottle of cooking sherry he had refused. Perhaps he should have taken her advice. With such a thirst bed would have been the best place.

"I want you to meet——" he softened as Barbara touched his arm, "my father. Daddy, this is Mr. Denny."

"Our new D.C. Well, well, sir, I'm glad to meet you." He was a big, jolly man, whose good-humour seemed always to come still-born. With a different wife, Denny guessed, he would have been quite a character, the life and soul of the party, but now he moved uncertainly, spoke uncertainly, and his eyes were always ready for his wife's rebuff.

"Well, Mr. Denny," the old lady said, "we've heard a lot about you, of course, before ever you set foot in Manake."

"I'm sure of it."

She eyed him coldly. "They tell me that you're in love with the blacks."

"I try to understand them."

"Understand them!" She was too ill-tempered for politeness. "There's only one way of understanding the blacks: keep their noses to the soil, make them work, whip them if they're idle."

Her voice came to him through a haze of anger like an echo of all the arrogance and stupidity that had brought on the present troubles. He felt like shouting, but, catching Barbara's frightened stare he said, "I'm afraid that won't solve our present problems."

She said testily, "All these problems as you call them, are of their making. The white settlers have nothing to reproach themselves with."

"Well, you have got their land."

"Their land!" She tried to outstare him, and then, finding him as relentless as herself, changed her tactics so suddenly that he was caught unawares. "You're ill," she said. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you." He sat carefully on the chaise-longue with two feet of faded cretonne between them as a sort of no-man's-land. Certainly he felt ill. With the others watching

and listening, he felt like a sick actor: the show must go on. He saw Barbara perched apprehensively on the edge of a chair, Mr. Stanhope standing behind her. In a dark corner of the room Ian was cleaning a revolver. They were all waiting.

The old lady asked, "How long have you been out here, Mr. Denny?"

"Twenty years."

She nodded, "I expect you think that's a long time."

"Don't you?"

"I came out here in 1903."

"Tell him you were just a child, Jessie," the husband boomed. "Fifty years ago! You're not all that old."

His wife ignored him, and his boisterous good-humour whistled away into silence. She said, "You know the story? Two years before, they had built the railway."

"Seven hundred miles without a town," Mr. Stanhope said with miserable jollity, "without even a decent settlement. No industry, no produce. The cost—five million pounds." Meeting a withering look, he added lamely, "That's when they appealed for settlers."

The old lady said, "The real pioneers, men like my father, were out here already."

"Was he a farmer?" Denny asked.

"He was a missionary. He brought the word of God to these savages."

"That wouldn't be the job for a weakling."

"He was a brave man."

"How did they take it?"

"At first, they were friendly."

"And then?"

She leaned forward on her stick, and her eyes were looking past her daughter, past her loved son, to the proud almost forgotten days of her childhood. She said, "I was just a child. We were living on the coast with an English family. Their name—oh—I've forgotten. Graves, I think—or Groves—no—Grover. He was in the consular service.

My father would go out for a week at a time into the interior leaving me with them. I can picture him now, setting off with the swaying wagon, the Kipsigi boy running along beside. One week-end—he always tried to be back for Sunday—he didn't return. Two—three weeks, a month passed. Later they found the wagon, a skeleton picked white."

Barbara cried, "Oh, Mother—don't!"

"So you see," the old lady said, "these are the people you want me to understand. At least they haven't changed in the fifty years I've known them. If anything they are worse—just one step out of the jungle.

Denny repeated stubbornly, "I say again: You've got their land."

He could see—feel, almost, across the width of the chaise-longue—that she was furiously angry. "Couldn't we talk about something else?" Barbara said anxiously, but her mother's voice was still controlled as she said, "When I was married the white settlers were just coming to the highlands. To us it seemed quite perfect—God's own country. The rolling hills, the cedar trees, acacia, the perfect lake, flamingoes, the forest full of game."

"It was a wonderful country," her husband said. "It still is."

Again there was a flicker of annoyance, but she went on: "The countryside was perfect, but—and this is the point—we didn't have to take the land from anyone, because there was no one here."

"No Kikuyu?"

"It wasn't safe for them with the tribes of wandering Masai about. I tell you, these hills were deserted."

Denny tried to gather his confused thoughts. Although he had heard this story often enough before, he had forgotten the answer. You could always confound the best excuse with new damning facts.

"The good land that we took was empty," Mrs. Stanhope went on, "just virgin soil. We settled down—a cedar-wood

shack, a few cattle, a plough. Those who are anxious for us to give up our land should know something of the difficulties we had to face. No one knew what crops would grow. We had to find out the hard way—if the crops succeeded you were rich, if they failed you were hungry. Maize, sisal, pyrethrum. It seems easy now.”

Her husband said, “Even if the crops took, you had a hundred difficulties to overcome by trial and error.”

“Plant diseases, animal diseases, hungry antelope and gazelle—even a lion or two in those days.”

“Then there were the locusts.”

Mrs. Stanhope said, “One year they almost beat us. I can remember it now—a black cloud casting a shadow on the fields and then, as they settled, the crawling, moving carpet destroying a whole year’s work. They destroyed everything—everything.”

Denny had little idea of what she was saying. Above resentment, above the thick after-effect of fever, above his concern for Barbara, was the nagging desire for drink. He asked automatically, “How did you get over that?”

Mrs. Stanhope said, “There was one farm they passed by. Their seed tided us over. It was an act of God.”

“Belonged to old Mathers, the most drunken, godless, womanising devil. . . .” Mr. Stanhope chuckled and then, meeting his wife’s eyes, uneasily subsided. The boy had put down his revolver and cleaning-rod; Barbara was still sitting nervously on the edge of her chair. Denny felt that it must always be like this: no repose, no comfort. The whirr of the ceiling fan was like a murmur of agitation. Only the old lady could feel at ease, for she could dominate them all. She said, “There were other difficulties, of course—native labour, for instance, untrained, utterly unreliable. There were oxen to be broken to the plough, streams to be diverted. It was hard, pioneering work—but rewarding.”

“Obviously.”

“Oh yes,” she said. “It’s easy to call us names—land



grabbers, exploiters of the blacks. But it's all so much Red propaganda."

"How do you mean?" Denny knew that he must concentrate. He wasn't going to allow her this complacent victory.

She said, "I told you before—all the Kikuyu troubles have been brought on by themselves. They've had their chance to share the good land."

"Their chance!" Denny said angrily. "What chance has a native of competing with the white man? A wooden plough—and ox—if he's lucky."

With infuriating assurance the old lady said, "Hard work, perseverance—that was why we succeeded. And one thing more—common sense."

"I see you don't mention capital."

"Why should I? Did I have capital when I started?"

Ian jerked nervously in his chair. "I think we must admit. Mother, that you are a remarkable woman."

"Fiddlesticks! I worked hard and intelligently—and always I have been guided by this." She rested her hand on the Bible.

Only the impression of Barbara's pleading glance restrained Denny from irrevocable rudeness. The old lady stood for everything he hated. She was intolerant, domineering, prejudiced in the extreme—and yet she was Barbara's mother. Denny said, "Even if all these things are true, couldn't the native have made an equally good living with a bit of capital?"

She sneered at him. "Never in a thousand years."

"Why not?"

"Didn't you have shifting cultivation in your old district?"

"Of course, but that can be controlled. It only needs patience, a few sympathetic officers. The natives are willing to learn."

She sniffed, "I don't know what you had—Kipsigi, Nandi, perhaps. The 'Kukes' aren't so accommodating."

"Maybe they've never had the chance."

She flared up at him, "You are a stranger to this district, Mr. Denny. You would do well to remember that. Perhaps your strange ideas worked in your old district, but here . . ."

"Not strange ideas," Denny began, but she took his objection in her stride.

"When a 'Kuke' is given a strip of forest or bush he burns it clear and starts to raise his crops—one after the other, two harvests a year, until the land is exhausted. Then he moves on to a new plot and his goats or cattle finish off the destruction of the old. I tell you, the African farmer would soon turn the whole country to barren scrub."

They glared at each other across the chaise-longue, the woman who hated blacks and the man who loved them, and watching them, he was aware, sat the girl who would have to bridge their enmity.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HE AWOKE FROM THE DEEP SLEEP OF EXHAUSTION into a sudden clarity of tension. Rising on one elbow, he found the revolver under his pillow. The room was full of translucent moonlight, for he had opened one of the window shutters on retiring, and he could see clearly across the lawn to the wire fence, the curving roof of a barn and beyond to the forest and the rising hill. A shadow threatened; but it was only the shutter moving in the breeze. Outside there was no movement in the cold landscape, but he could hear the jungle night noises which, after twenty years, were as familiar to him as the snores of a sleeping wife. There must have been a stream near-by, for the cawing of a multitude of bull frogs came as an undertone to all other sounds. Innumerable insects fizzed and whirred and trilled to the night. A hyena screeched in the jungle and was answered by another, farther up the hill, and then by a dog in one of the out-houses of the farm. Denny listened and waited.

Then, when he was about to relax his vigilance, he heard the sound that had wakened him, a turning door-handle. It moved quietly as the locked door resisted a gentle pressure. Then there was a faint click as the handle was released.

Denny slid out of bed as quietly as possible and walked bare-footed towards the door. He held his breath to listen, but there was no sound audible above the jungle chorus outside. With the revolver ready in his right hand he turned the key and flung open the door.

"Barbara!"

She too had a revolver and her eyes, meeting his startled gaze, were bright with terror.

"Barbara! What's the matter? What has happened?"

Motioning him to silence with her free hand, she pushed past him into the bedroom and closed the door. For a

moment she seemed too distraught to speak. Her long hair hanging to her shoulders, was soft and extraordinarily fair in the moonlight; the night-dress made her look like a young defenceless girl. He asked again, taking her hand, "What has happened?"

She relaxed suddenly. "I thought—— Didn't you hear—— just now——?"

"Hear what?"

"Someone at the window." A part of her fear returned as she looked across the room to the open lawn. "How you can sleep with the shutters open. . . ."

He smiled, "I'm prepared to take the risk—sooner than be suffocated."

She said, "You're a brave man. I knew it when I first saw you."

"Appearances can be deceptive."

"I know. You saved Matheson's life."

"And my own at the same time."

She said softly, "I think it was that which really made me love you." As he took her in his arms she said, with her head muffled against his pyjama jacket, "You'll have to find courage for both of us, darling."

"Why do you say that?"

"I'm such a coward."

He went across to the window and leant as far as possible across the sill. There was no one in the garden, not even a shadow, for the moon was riding high over the mountain on that side of the house. "No one there. You probably heard a rat." As he turned he saw that she had followed him half-way across the room and now standing in a pool of moonlight her body was silhouetted through the night-dress.

He said thickly, "You'd better go back to your own room. If you like, I'll have a quick look round."

"Thank you." She laughed uncertainly, and said, "It's as well mother can't see us like this."

She sat on the edge of her bed with a dressing-gown

round her shoulders, as he looked in the cupboards, the bathroom.

"No one there." Although there were twelve feet of matted flooring between them, he did not dare to raise his eyes. Yet he was painfully aware of her nearness, her bare feet, the night-dress, the bed. He turned his back on her, "Well, I'll get back to my room. Lock your door. You'll be quite safe. If you want me, though, you can knock—on the wall. I'm a light sleeper."

"Thank you." She said, as he reached the door, "You don't think I'm too much of a coward?"

"Of course not." He turned clumsily, and took a step back towards the bed. "Anyone can be afraid. It's conquering fear that's the real test. Besides——" he made a vague gesture, "it's so much worse—in here. I mean, the lonely house, a barbed-wire fence, the window shutters. You'd feel much better outside in a tent."

She smiled, "It's hard to believe. Still, one day you'll have to show me."

"Yes." Once again he made the gesture of leaving, "Shall I turn out the light?"

"No—yes." She explained, "Turn it out so that you can understand my childish fears." As the room switched into darkness her voice came to him like a lover's call, trembling matter-of-factness to cover desire. "Now you can see my warning signal."

"Warning signal?"

"Come over here." She reached for his hand in the darkness. "This bar of light above my bed. It's a reflection of the air-vent in the shutters. Oh—the hours, sleepless hours I've lain here watching that."

"I don't understand." Deliberately he tried to concentrate on what she was saying.

"While the light is clear I am safe. Anyone at the window would blot it out."

He said with compassion, "You poor kid! How long has it been like this?"

Her shoulder shrugged against his chest. "Six months—a year. It seems a lifetime. I've died a thousand deaths."

"Then it's time you got away from here. Haven't you any friends in England? Can't you take a holiday?"

She whispered, "And leave you?" She moved against him as softly and beguilingly as a kitten. He could feel her breast against his arm. There was nothing for it, he knew, and he was realist enough to accept the inevitable without conscience or regret.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IT WAS A DIFFERENT WORLD in the morning, a world of contentment and hope and gentle sunshine. Standing at the open window of the dining-room he could look down the green curve of the hill to the valley, the pure blue and white of Flamingo Lake, the town, and across the chequered floor of the valley to the sharp rise topped by rolling hills of the eastern escarpment. It was a perfect morning. In the nearer meadows dew was heavy on the grass and on the brilliant colours of a million flowers. A few gazelle were feeding by the forest edge, and their quick nervous movements as they raised their heads, sniffing for danger, had a tender charm. A duik-duik, as insubstantial as a fairy, ran towards the safety of the scrub.

Denny turned expectantly as the door opened, but it was only the Kikuyu houseboy, Joseph, coming to re-lay the table. Four sets of dirty plates, cups and saucers. Although it was only eight o'clock, the Stanhopes had already breakfasted. Denny asked, "Where is the memsahib?"

"Bwana?"

"Where is the memsahib?"

Joseph looked away, searching for the right words, and Denny repeated the question in Ki' Swahili. At once the black boy's expression changed. "In living-room," he said, "memsahib, Missy Barbara, Stanhope bwana."

"Do you know what they are doing?"

The houseboy gave a sly secret smile and held his hands together in supplication. So that was it! Morning prayers. He thought he could hear the uniform drone of voices. He sat down, irritable with embarrassment. "All right, I'll have my breakfast."

Remembering the old lady's hostility he felt some of the elation draining away. Would she ever accept him as a son-in-law? Did he want to be accepted? Not if he had to

compromise. And yet he couldn't forget Barbara's face, calm and trusting on the pillow.

He had finished his breakfast before Mrs. Stanhope came into the dining-room. She stood in the doorway, leaning on her stick. "So you're up."

"Yes. I'm sorry I was late for breakfast."

"How do you feel this morning?" The small civility came strangely from her lips.

"I'm quite all right." It wasn't true. His head was still aching and his body was sore from his fall in the ravine, but he had to get back to the camp.

Perversely she took his restlessness as a slight. "If you're tired of our house already . . ."

"There's work to be done," Denny said. "You must realise that. I've only just taken over . . . a new district. Then there's the road."

"Ah, yes. The road." She sat down at the head of the table and he noticed that in spite of her disability her straight back never touched the chair. She was as unyielding as an inquisitor. She said, "Tell me, Mr. Denny, is it true that you hope to drive the road up here before the rains come?"

"Yes. That's what I intend—that's what I must do."

She looked at him quizzically. "I don't think it's possible."

"I say it is. After all, I've built a good many roads in my time."

"As difficult as this?"

"No." He had to admit it.

"Or at such a speed?"

"No, only——" He stumbled on through the maze of facts and figures. "This road *must* be built. It isn't as though . . . The way I see it is this. the district I have taken over, the whole area, is under civil war. There can be no prosperity, no peace, no happiness until the Mau Mau is beaten. And the way to beat it is the road."

She said, "It's a different song you are singing this morning—no more love for the blacks."



He said angrily, "You can't put it as simply as that. Of course I still have affection for blacks. I understand and respect them. It's because I understand them that I can see this trouble from their point of view."

"Their point of view!"

"Yes. Do you stop to think of the hundreds of thousands of simple men—'Kukes'—as well as the other tribes—who were perfectly happy with the old order, who had no grouse against the white man, who want only to live in peace?"

"What about them? They can easily show where their loyalty lies."

"And be sure of a quick death from the simi blade?" He said passionately, "They are the people I want to protect, the innocent villagers drawn by fear into a war they don't understand. They are the people in the front line—not you and your farming friends."

"It seems to me," the old lady said, "as though you are angry because you and the police can't do your job. If you can't protect the natives . . ."

He nodded. "You're right, of course. If we can't give protection how can we hope to keep the Kikuyu on our side? That's why I must have the road." He stared across the rolling landscape, which was already becoming blurred and brittle in the heat. He said again, "That's why I must have the road."

A man on horseback was cantering across the open meadows above the scrub, an old man with a rifle across the saddle, a dog trotting at heel. Even at a distance of several hundred yards it was possible to see that he was an old-timer. He rode effortlessly, with his eyes on the ground, as though all three—the man, the horse, the dog—had been hunting together for many years and over countless hills. Denny said, "Here's another visitor."

The old lady turned angrily in her chair, and then relaxed. "It's only Angus, my brother. He was on duty last night with the Police Reserve." She turned back to the table and to her argument. She said, "I've been out here so much

longer than you: I can't understand your attitude to the blacks. Frankly it disgusts me." She said, "You may have heard, I'm a religious woman. I have had a hard life, but there has never been a time—never a day—when I haven't prayed for guidance—and received it. For fifty years I have employed Africans—Masa'i, Kipsigi, as well as Kikuyu. I have treated them well and fairly. When they worked well they were rewarded, when they worked badly they were punished. I have never had reason to believe that they were anything better than savages. This violence doesn't surprise me in the least. It only shows how near they are to the jungle."

Denny said, "It's easy to brand a tribe for the acts of violence of the few. I know—I've seen," he shivered, remembering the mutilated bodies at Kipango, the child scrabbling in vain for death. "I've seen what really happens, the murdered natives. . . ."

"Well then?"

"Only, it's impossible to judge, as you have judged; lump all the Kikuyu together—all the blacks, if you like; make them work, whip them, hang them, if necessary."

"I'm a God-fearing woman," Mrs. Stanhope said. "You needn't think that I should be unjust. Keep the natives down by force—yes. I'm all for it. It's our lives or theirs. Only, if it's justice you want, don't forget that it's the white settlers who have put everything into the country—money, intelligent planning, and, most of all, hard work. Another thing, while the whites are the masters you can rely on them to act as civilised men and women. They won't go round murdering the blacks."

"I don't know." He sat down on the chair beside her. Because he was a fair man he could see the truth of her arguments, but he could see, as she never would, that there *was* another side to the question. He picked up a fork and traced a pattern with it on the cloth. "You talk about murder," he said. "Have you heard about the policeman at Ligoni—arrested for killing three farm workers?"

"He was tried and acquitted."

"Yes."

"Of course you can believe anything if you listen to Red propaganda."

"Then there was old Viljoen, accused of torturing a Mau Mau suspect under screening."

"Also tried and acquitted."

He looked at her sadly, the old yellow face set in lines of rigid intolerance. Across the high bridge of her nose the skin was tight and almost transparent; the grey eyes were fearless, with the absolute assurance of a woman who, through constant quoting of the words of God, had made a god of herself. He asked her the question which he knew he must ask. Because she was Barbara's mother he must know the answer. "Is it true . . . ?" He shifted uneasily as the door opened and someone came into the room. He said, "Is it just idle gossip that you were in trouble once?"

She said sharply, "What do you mean?"

"I heard . . . I wouldn't repeat this if it hadn't come from seemingly good authority. . . ."

"Well?"

"I heard that twenty years ago you had a houseboy, N'joro, flogged to death."

She looked at him narrowly, neither denying nor confirming, and he could see how she could dominate and strike fear in her children. She said, "That's a very dangerous thing to pass on."

"You don't say whether it's true."

"True, of course it's true." It was her brother Angus who had entered the room, and now he teetered unsteadily across to the table. He was a small, wiry, ageless Scotsman and he was comfortably drunk. He explained thickly, "Twenty years ago things were different—no societies for the protection of niggers, no police, no goddam Socialists. It was a free country." He fumbled for the flask in his pocket, and then, finding that it was too much trouble, leant heavily across the table. "I won't say Jessie didn't go

a bit far sometimes. A whip and a gun. 'Strong is the arm of the Lord.' "

"How dare you! Coming in here like that . . . ! You were supposed to be out on police patrol and you come home drunk."

"I'm no' so drunk, Jessie." He smiled foolishly. "That's the trouble with teetotallers—no idea of the finer shades of intoxication—no idea whatever!" His bloodshot eyes focused on Denny. He asked belligerently, "Who's this?"

She could not keep the sniff out of her expression. "This is Mr. Denny, our new D.C."

"Ye don't say!" His fatuous expression of interest irritated Denny, who guessed that the old man was pleased to welcome a fellow drinker. But there was more to his interest than that. He asked, "Is it true what I hear—all this bull about driving a road up Kilavo Ravine?"

"It's true all right."

"And ye think ye can do it?"

"I don't know yet. I haven't made a complete recce. But there's no reason that I can see—at least from the map."

Angus nodded sardonically. "Oh aye—the map."

"Well, it's all I've had time for, but if you've had sufficient experience you can tell most things from a map."

"Maybe. Maybe. But there's a hell of a lot of things ye'll not find there."

"Such as?"

The old man breathed whisky across the table. "Do ye think for one minute *they* will stay quietly, hidden in the bushes, while you drive this road—a military road—up the escarpment to destroy them?"

"You mean the Mau Mau?"

"Aye."

"Well, we'd thought of that, of course, but I don't see that they can have more than a nuisance value."

Angus shook his head. "Just wait, son, until you wake up one morning to find your askari dead—hacked to bits or maybe just a spear jabbed in the stomach."

"It's already happened."

"And ye're still going on with the road?"

"Of course. I've said it a dozen times. I intend to have the road up here before the rains come."

Angus blinked with reluctant respect. "Weel, I've heard a lot about ye, Mr. Denny. I've heard . . ." He made a gesture of tolerance, knocking over a sauce bottle. "But never mind. I'll say this of ye—ye're a brave man."

Denny looked out across the blue valley. Barbara and Ian were walking across from the stables with a saddled horse. They saw him at the window, and Barbara waved. "I'm a determined man," Denny said.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ONCE HE HAD DECIDED that a road up Kilavo Ravine was possible he went to work with energy. Subconsciously, he knew that he would be judged on his success or failure and, having broadcast his intention to reach the highlands before the rains, he had to fight against time as well as other obstacles, seen and unseen. In truth the other obstacles did not appear too formidable at first. For a week or ten days, as the native workmen pushed yard by yard over the stony foothills, the progress was remarkable. There were few trees and only patches of low scrub, which could be easily removed by the bulldozer. From dawn until dusk he drove the workmen by word and insult and example until they came to fear the sight of his stocky, unrelenting figure. He introduced a system of piece-work, which was new to them, and when they understood that they would be paid more for every yard of progress above the day's stint they showed almost a zest for their work. But they could not be trusted for long. If he left them for half an hour, to go to Mohammed's store or to confer with the P.C. in Manake, there were always a score of men sleeping soundly in the sun when he returned.

But the road pressed onwards, a red scar up the foot of the mountain, and one that could be seen from the clubs and bars in Manake, nearly five miles away. European opinion wavered. Whatever the new D.C.'s faults—and few of the farmers had even met him—he was certainly achieving results. Within a fortnight the red line had crossed the foothills and had buried itself in the shadow of the ravine. Now, said the doubters, he has started the real task. Let's see what he makes of this.

From his several reconnaissances Denny knew better than anyone the truth of this observation. In the thick undergrowth, the whip-like saplings lining the donga, the cedar

and podo trees, and the occasional infuriating giant thorn, the surveying was almost a whole-time job. On the open foothills he had spent the last weary half-hour of each day driving the guide pickets for the next day's stint, but now it was necessary to survey yard by yard as they went, and even then a hidden rock stratum or an unexpected gully might force them to change to a completely new direction. But he accepted each new difficulty as a challenge, and soon, above the dreadful weariness, he began to enjoy the fight. Every waking hour was spent in sheer physical labour and the short night was given to dreamless sleep. He had never felt as fit. The whisky bottles in his bedroom were mostly untouched. Once his hip flask was empty he couldn't spare the time to refill it, and soon he found that the old desire was lost, or at least was less urgent than his determination to finish the road.

For a week he saw nothing of his subordinates, but when he had reached the beginning of the ravine, a jeep came up the hill one evening, and he saw Lucien's shallow smile through the settling dust. Lucien climbed out stiffly and looked around, grinning mirthlessly with his bad teeth. "Hullo, sir. I thought I'd come to see what progress you were making." He added grudgingly, "You've certainly altered the face of the hill."

"We've done the easy part," Denny said. "The next few weeks will be the real test."

"That's what we thought," Lucien said. "We were discussing it at the officers' club."

I bet you were, Denny thought. And I know where your sympathies lay. He asked, "How is young Palethorpe getting on?"

"Oh—all right, sir. You know . . . ? There's not much he can do. I like to feel that—well—the responsible jobs are in my own hands."

"So he's not very busy?" Denny asked shortly.

"Well. . . ."

"I'd like him up here," Denny said. "Now that we're

coming to the difficult part I could do with some help."

Lucien gave a sickly look of uncertainty. "Well, sir, if it comes to that there are plenty of routine jobs. It's only——"

"Routine jobs can wait," Denny said. "This road is a priority. I'd like him up here."

"Very well." Lucien kicked thoughtfully at a small cactus plant. "I suppose——" He put on his fake air of concern. "I suppose he'll be all right."

"What do you mean?"

"Well—there's real danger here. I only thought . . . not the job for a nervous boy."

"The way to conquer fear," Denny said, not troubling to hide his dislike, "is to face and understand the thing you're afraid of. Send him up here. He'll be all right with me."

They wandered up the first slopes of the ravine, past the low mound of earth and stones where Temli, the porter, was buried, until they reached the dappled shadows of the cedar trees. Behind lay the open hill with the graceful curve of the new road reaching down to Venner's Gorge. The wide valley was already blurring to dusk, and the ribs and spines of the distant escarpment were edged with pink. Down in Lubungu village the cattle were lowing as they bedded down for the night, and the ankle bells of children sounded across the still air. A flock of guinea-fowl called softly, the workmen murmured round the camp fire, and a long steady breeze rustled through the grass.

Lucien shivered. He said grudgingly. "It's a tough job you've taken on, sir. I don't envy you."

"It's a job that must be done," Denny said. "If we are ever to have peace. The police, the army, even the Kikuyu Home Guard, are helpless without a proper line of communication."

"Well, at least, sir, you'll earn the gratitude of the settlers up in the highlands. Your friends the Stanhopes, for instance."

Denny looked at him closely, but he couldn't see past his careful mask.



"By the way, sir—" Lucien was ingratiating again—"I've got something in the jeep you might like."

"What's that?"

"Half a dozen bottles of Johnny Walker."

Denny asked, without anger, "You thought I might want it?"

"Well . . ."

"You can take it back." He felt in the mood for a gesture, after the weeks of sweat and toil, the pride of achievement, physical well-being spiced with the fragrance of consummated love. "Thanks for your trouble, but I shan't need it."

It was worth the sacrifice to see Lucien's face, astounded and crestfallen. "But I thought . . . at least, sir, if you're going to have Tom Palethorpe here. . . ."

"Well?"

"I don't know. . . . I didn't want to tell you. . . ."

"You needn't," Denny said. "He told me himself. We don't need whisky," he said, and then with an unaccustomed humour, "unless it's for snake bites."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE NIGHT THAT PALETHORPE CAME saw the first of their skirmishes with the Mau Mau. It was the golden hour of twilight, when shadows settled in the ravine; tired workmen, silent except for an occasional stab of laughter, crouched round the fire; the last haze of daylight lingered across the valley. From the canvas chair which Ali had set up by the door of the tent Denny could see that everything was set for the night: the gate of the barbed-wire fence shut and padlocked, the two sentries, with rifles slung, moving round the perimeter. The fence, he knew, would be of little use against the Mau Mau—any black man could climb silently through its three wide-meshed strands in a few minutes—but, understanding the native mind, he had encouraged the police to build it. Now, at least, the workmen would relax at night.

Inside the tent Palethorpe was unpacking his valise. Although Denny had offered him a tent of his own, the boy's reluctant voice had betrayed his need for companionship. Ali had set the two camp-beds side by side with a two-foot strip of stony earth between to take their chairs, valises, shaving gear, as well as five hundred rounds of .303 ammunition which Denny kept by his bed for safety. It would be a squeeze, as Ali had complained, but seeing Palethorpe's set face, the quick nervous reaction to every sound, Denny had not been cruel enough to make the boy sleep alone. Even now in the silence which interspersed the rustling of clothes, books, blankets, he could imagine him swigging quickly from his flask with one eye guiltily watching the flap.

Denny had been drinking, too, but no more than any farmer would drink after a hard day's work, and then for slow pleasure rather than urgent need. In the receptive mood of well-being he recognised that he could conquer this obsession—*had* conquered it, in fact—and although he

was not given to introspection he knew that his success could be traced to Barbara. After years of wandering, without care or reason, outside the frigid bounds of respectability he had been caught, first by pity, then by love. She had given him what he was not even conscious of having lost: his self-respect; and the road, which he could still see in part, despite the gathering dusk, would complete the redemption.

He sat up, fingering his gun, as black dots moved over the brow of the hill. A patrol? They were moving too openly, without any attempt at concealment, for him to feel alarmed, but he watched them carefully until they joined the road only a hundred yards below the camp. It was a patrol of the Kikuyu Home Guard, twenty strong and in charge of a big, mean-faced sergeant. Although there could be no doubt of their identity the sentries challenged zealously. The sergeant came forward and was admitted through the opening in the wire.

"What is it, sir?" Palethorpe's face showed like a white moon in the tent doorway."

"The Home Guard. Nothing to worry about."

Denny walked down the hill to the fence. "Jambo, Sergeant."

"Jambo, bwana."

"Anything to report?"

"Nothing, bwana. All good and quiet."

"Where have you come from?"

"Banare, bwana."

"Over the hill?"

"Yes, bwana."

Denny looked round, feeling vaguely dissatisfied and yet . . . He couldn't be sure which day it was. In his determination to finish the road he had forgotten many things—reports to the P.C. at Manake, ration returns. Now he couldn't remember what day it was. On a small knoll outside the camp the patrol was squatting patiently. Behind, the wall of the mountain rose sheer into the darkness, gutted beyond the camp by the menacing deeper darkness

of the ravine. Through the gloom the nearer trees were silhouetted in strange and threatening shapes. A lion roaring up the mountain and hyenas on the nearer slopes shattered the evening stillness.

Denny saw that Palethorpe had followed him down the hill. He asked, "What day is it?"

"Wednesday, sir."

"That's what I thought." Denny said to the sergeant in Ki' Swahili, "Why do you come this way today?"

"Bwana?"

"According to the list I was given you were supposed to patrol this way tomorrow."

The sergeant's ugly face erupted in thought. At last he said, "Major Stanhope tell us to patrol round lake. Then Lieutenant Stanhope he come and say, No, we come patrol over hill to new road."

It sounded like the truth. He knew that Barbara's father fixed the weekly routes for patrols, and he could imagine Ian changing it for a whim. Probably the boy thought, as Denny did, that it was bad tactics to keep rigidly to a pre-arranged scheme of patrols. Information could leak out, and indeed it was significant that neither the Home Guard nor the white Police Reserve had achieved even one substantial success on their many patrols. Probably the route of this patrol had been changed by Ian without consulting his father.

"Is anything wrong, sir?" Palethorpe asked.

Denny shook his head. "No—no. There's nothing wrong." He said, "That's all right, Sergeant. You might go a way up the ravine."

"Yes, bwana."

He knew from the sergeant's voice and his half-hearted salute that they wouldn't go far: probably into the cover of the first trees and then, after a silent wait, back again to declare the ravine clear. It would take a brave man to penetrate those jungle slopes after dark, or, Denny thought with a smile, a sick man. He wouldn't care to repeat, in full

possession of his senses, his hazardous climb to the highlands.

He stood with Palethorpe, watching the patrol drag unwillingly up the hill. Raggedly clad, ill-armed, they were scarcely an imposing force, but he knew from the records in his office that they could be effective. Moving through their native hills and jungles with a sureness that the white man could never emulate they could, given a reasonable start, follow a marauding gang to the very depths of the feather-tapered bamboo jungle. The patrol they were watching now had only a couple of shot-guns and an assortment of simis, pangas and knives, but the Mau Mau would lie quietly while they passed. Most important of all was the psychological effect on the Kikuyu. The terror could never be beaten until *they* found the courage to defy their tribal fears and superstitions.

"Wonder how far they'll go."

"I was just wondering the same thing." Denny turned back towards the tent. "Still, they've shown themselves. We'll probably have a good night."

It proved to be an unfortunate remark, for they had not walked another ten paces before a flurry of shots and wild cries came from the edge of the forest. Denny grasped the boy's arm. It was too dark to see farther than a few yards beyond the wire, but as they listened they could hear the shouts and grunts and cries of pain of a hand-to-hand struggle.

"Have you got your gun?" Denny started to run towards the gate. Pulled into action, Palethorpe followed at a shambling trot, and then, realising that he might be left between the safe ignominy of the camp and the dangerous company of his superior, he charged wildly down the hill in pursuit of Denny.

They cleared the gate and ran side by side up the steep, rough incline towards the trees. It was hard going. The rocks and rough grass and loose shale were unseen obstacles in the darkness, and Denny in particular stumbled repeatedly

as he clambered grimly up the ravine. His companion, as though gaining confidence from his superior fitness, was slightly ahead all the time and once he stopped altogether to call encouragement. "Keep going, sir. We're nearly there."

As they reached the forest they advanced more slowly with revolvers cocked and ears alert for every sound. But the encounter had taken place further up the ravine than they had supposed. Standing for a moment as his tortured breathing seemed to smother all other sounds, Denny gasped, "Can you hear them?"

"Farther up, sir—farther up the ravine."

They plunged on again, striking blindly now through the undergrowth, whippy saplings, tearing euphorbia, until suddenly they came to the open donga. They waited again and listened. The noises of high conflict were over and yet above the forest stillness they could hear rustlings, pad of running feet, the brittle noise of men plunging through the trees.

"They're coming this way," Denny said. He pushed the boy into the covering darkness of a bush before advancing up the white line of the river bed. The crashing steps were nearer now, so near that he expected to see a fear-maddened native come bursting from the saplings at any moment. The sounds were becoming louder still. He thought he could see the bushes parting. And then, when it was almost too late, he saw a movement across the donga. A black form, almost indistinguishable against the dark forest, running, stumbling to safety.

"Stop!" He drew a quick bead and fired. It seemed, so he thought, that the man stumbled, but in a moment he was lost to view and his progress sounded tantalisingly over the stillness.

But there was another coming. Facing across the donga Denny rested the revolver across his forearm. This time he wouldn't miss. As before, the sound came overwhelmingly near. His eyes strained against the darkness.

Then confusingly, from behind, he heard Palethorpe's shout. "Look out, sir! Look out!"

He turned quickly and had an impression of a black face distorted by hate, a raised simi, and then a shot. The native stopped dead, gazed stupidly, and sank to the ground.

It was over too quickly for Denny to feel any excitement. He stood, conscious of the dead arm flung across his boot, but he was as calm as a spectator at a cricket match as he said, "Good shot," and then, realising that this was not enough, "You saved my life."

Palethorpe came into the opening with the revolver hanging loosely from his finger.

"You saved my life," Denny repeated, with more warmth.

The boy looked at him dazedly. "Yes—I suppose I did." He asked, "Is he—dead?"

Denny kicked the arm from his foot. "He's dead all right. Straight through the chest. A good shot!"

"I thought—I was afraid—I might hit you."

"As well you didn't," Denny said, with grim humour. "I'd never have forgiven you."

Down the edge of the donga the Home Guard patrol came with their prisoner, a sullen-looking youth, apparently oblivious of the angry-looking wound in his shoulder. Another of the gang had been killed, and one of the Home Guard was wounded. Denny noticed that it was Palethorpe who gave the orders for burying the dead man and for treating the wounded. There was a new timbre in his voice as he strode backwards and forwards across the escarpment, a master in his own world—a man's world.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ON THE FOLLOWING DAY he had four visitors. Hardly had the dew-sodden earth crumbled again to dust in the morning sun before a long red car nosed like some tropical insect up the hill. Mohammed. Denny watched with annoyance as it bumped carefully over the uneven road surface. He had sent Palethorpe into Manake at dawn, and he could ill afford any diversion from his set task. The road had to be driven another hundred yards today, and there was a shoulder of rock which might prove troublesome. He hadn't decided yet whether there was enough firm ground round the base that could be built up to hold the road or whether the rock would have to be removed with dynamite. Already he was missing Palethorpe.

"Mr. Denny—sir." The Syrian was calling with concern before he was properly out of the car. He stood on one foot, holding to the car door as he eased his other leg between the door and the driving seat. His trouser was caught at the knee, exposing one white calf as he advanced towards Denny with hand outstretched, face wrinkled with concern. "Mr. Denny, sir. Are you all right?"

"All right! Of course I'm all right!"

"I thought . . . When I heard about this outrage . . ."

"It was nothing much. Four Mau Mau. Lucky for us the Home Guard found them."

"An act of Providence, Mr. Denny. If you believed in my religion, you would know that you are protected."

Denny looked up the curving line of the ravine, sinister even in the brightness of day, and, remembering how he had stumbled and lain there helplessly for more than a day, he felt cold. He remembered too how *she* had found him as he struck the highlands; he remembered her cool hand, her tears. "Protected," he said; "perhaps you're right."

Mohammed spread his hands in assurance. "Oh, yes,



Mr. Denny. If the patrol had come today, according to plan, they would have been too late. It was Providence that altered the plan, it was Providence sent them up the ravine."

"How do you know all this?" Denny asked narrowly. "How do you know the plan was altered?"

Mohammed was not discomfited, but suddenly, for a few seconds, he was an Oriental. The eyes were closed, the mouth set, revealing nothing. Then he relaxed. "Why, it is common knowledge. In Banare; in Manake too: the Indian traders, you know . . . full of gossip. . . . Everyone knows about the attack."

"And that the patrol was changed? How could they know that?"

Mohammed smiled, and spoke slowly, as though playing for time. "I see you have already forgotten what I said, Mr. Denny, when you first came to my store."

"What was that?"

"I said that, in this almost impossible task you have set yourself, it would be well to distinguish clearly between friend and foe."

Denny turned and looked over the camp. The cook, a Meru boy, was crouching by the fire. Was he to be trusted? With black haunches glistening with sweat, teeth grinning whitely, he looked as harmless as a dog. Yet the Meru were allies of the Kikuyu. There were Kikuyu amongst the labourers, and one of the other police was an Embu, another allied tribe. How could you label any man as friend or foe?

"I said that I was your friend, Mr. Denny, and that was true."

"It's not possible to say who can be trusted," Denny said harshly. "It's been proved a hundred times—the old, faithful servant, the houseboy who has become almost one of the family. . . . They're the very ones who open the door when the Mau Mau come. Trust no one. That's the way to avoid betrayal."

Mohammed said, "There, Mr. Denny, you speak like one

of my own people. Trust no one. And yet—it would be comforting to have a few people, even one, who would never betray you.”

Up the hill a tree was being felled: axes beat rhythmically until the tearing of branches and foliage marked the fall. Two labourers with shovels walked slowly towards the end of the road. “I can trust no one,” Denny said, “no one.”

Mohammed took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped it across his face. “It’s difficult, I agree. Even your own people. . . .” He passed delicately from that subject and went on, “Surely you know your own boy?”

“Ah? Oh yes, I can trust him.”

“And me, Mr. Denny. I could be of help to you, I would like to help you.” The fat pasty face shone with sweat and sincerity.

Denny laughed. “You are helping me—with the road. I was coming down one day to thank you. I haven’t been held up for anything I needed.”

“Thank you. . . . I have done my best. . . .” He was as pleased and embarrassed as a schoolboy. “Only . . . I wanted more than that.”

“I’m sorry, Mohammed, you’ll have to talk clearly. How else can you help?”

“By being your friend, Mr. Denny; by being one you can trust. Oh, don’t laugh at me. I know I’m only a Syrian trader who has grown fat on the profits he has made from cheap cotton dresses, from sewing machines, from castor oil and whisky——” He paused, “By the way, there’s half a crate of John Haig in my car, I thought . . .”

Denny shook his head. There was another car coming up the hill, a Humber staff car. This wasn’t going to be a good day for work. Denny said, “Thanks, Mohammed, but I’m well stocked.”

“I’d like you to look on this as a gift, a token of appreciation.”

“You know I can’t do that, but thanks all the same.” He took Mohammed’s huge biceps and propelled him back to

his car. "It was good of you to come, Mohammed, and thanks for your help with the road."

The Syrian eased himself with difficulty into the driver's seat. He looked up like a discarded lover, unwilling to go. "You have only to ask, Mr. Denny, at any time."

"Thanks a lot." Denny made to close the door and then held it. "By the way, how *did* you hear so much about last night's affair?"

Mohammed hesitated. Then he said, "For you, Mr. Denny, I will break a business principle: never betray a debtor."

"I don't follow."

The heavy Roman head leant through the open window. There was just a hint of malice in his voice as Mohammed said, "I think you should ask young Mr. Palethorpe."

Palethorpe! He couldn't begin to work out what this meant before Mohammed's car slid over the hill and the staff car emerged from its cloud of dust. The Provincial Commissioner was there and Lucien. The staff driver leapt out almost before the car had stopped, but Lucien beat him to it. His bad teeth showed like a warning of insincerity. "Here we are, sir."

"Good morning, Lucien." Denny reached the car as the P.C. was climbing stiffly out. He returned the older man's firm handshake. "Good morning, sir. It's good to see you."

"Thought I'd come out," the P.C. said, stamping life into his numbed legs. "Heard about last night from Lucien here."

"I sent Palethorpe to report," Denny said, not understanding.

"I met him on the road early this morning," Lucien explained. "It was quite by chance. I thought . . . He wanted to go to Banare, Mohammed's store. I said I'd report for him." He hesitated, "I hope you don't mind."

"Mind! Of course not, only he did witness the whole affair."

"How did he make out?" the P.C. asked.

"Who? Palethorpe? He was terrific, sir."

"Really!"

"There's no doubt he saved my life."

"You don't say!" The P.C. was genuinely glad, as only a good man can be glad in the success of another. "I can't tell you how pleased I am. I don't know. . . . I had the impression . . ." He hesitated and glanced at Lucien, whose smile was wearing thin.

"I shot at one man across the donga," Denny explained. "I missed. The next minute there was a madman with a simi coming at my back."

"And Palethorpe warned you?"

"There wasn't time. He shot him dead. It couldn't have been an easy shot."

"I don't know. . . ." The P.C. turned again to Lucien. "I didn't understand. . . ."

"No more did I, sir. When I saw Palethorpe this morning he was in such a state, all worked up. I probably misunderstood him."

"He was calm enough when he left here," Denny said.

The sun was high in the faultless sky now. The hillside, the wide valley, the steep tree-covered slopes were vibrant with sunlight. There was no escape from its pitiless glare. In the arid scrub king lizards basked with hooded eyes, the low thorn bushes crackled, the red earth dried to dust. Lucien sniggered uneasily, "Well, I don't know, sir. He seemed pretty worked up when I saw him."

"Probably got a bone to pick with Mohammed," the P.C. said easily. "I've had a few rows with the old rascal myself."

"Yes, I expect that was it." As they walked side by side round the perimeter of the camp, Lucien turned to Denny and asked, "By the way, sir, wasn't that Mohammed's car that passed us on the hill?"

However respectful his tone there could be no mistaking the malice in the question. There couldn't be another car like Mohammed's. Denny remembered thankfully how he had refused Mohammed's gift. A half-crate of whisky lying

uncovered in the sun would have been something of an embarrassment.

"Yes, that was Mohammed all right." He left it at that, knowing that any further explanation might look like a sign of weakness.

They toiled on, round the bend of the road and into the trees. The P.C. was seeing everything, the cut-away between two rock formations, the embankment beside the donga, the levelled earth, the growing pile of timber, acacia branches like gigantic fans, pines, giant thorns, podo trees, the fantastically shaped euphorbia. Farther up the ravine a bulldozer was put-putting into action. The native workmen, apprised by some secret code of the white man's approach, worked with energy. Black muscles, shining in beauty, wielded the long-handled shovels, flung pick-axes, hauled rocks and branches. "You've made a magnificent start," the P.C. said. "I'd no idea. . . ." He explained awkwardly, "Haven't been up here before. Thought you'd sooner get on in your own way, but," he paused and looked round, his quiet face beaming with pleasure, "this is magnificent. I wouldn't have believed it possible. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes . . ." He rested a hand on Denny's shoulder, a gesture of gratitude and affection. "I don't believe there's another man could have done it."

They walked another hundred yards to the limit of the road, and Denny explained his problem with the rock face. It was obvious that the P.C. was glad to have been asked; obvious too that he understood roads. With Denny and the native foreman at heel, he scrambled up the steep abutment of loose shale, through the undergrowth and tearing brambles, and then, by clinging to saplings and shallow-rooted trees, almost vertically up the side of the rock face. He stopped, panting, on the flat top. From this natural eminence they could see over the spreading greenery of the trees to the inner depths of the gully. The dark foliage spread from their feet like a carpet on some gigantic stairway, up the shelving hill, even overlapping the base of the

sheer walls of the ravine. There was seemingly no break in it, no gap where even a bird could penetrate, and it rose higher and higher until it was lost to sight over the skyline of a false crest.

The P.C. was still recovering his breath, but he said feelingly, "You've certainly taken on a job."

Denny nodded. "I know. I've been over the ground pretty thoroughly. It can be done."

"Well," the P.C. said, "if anyone can do it, you can." He was examining the rock on which they were standing. Twenty yards from the edge was a deep fissure. He knelt and plunged his arm in to the shoulder. He said, "I'm afraid you'll be making trouble for yourself if you try dynamiting. It'll break here—you'll get a thousand tons of rock across the valley."

"That's what I was afraid of. It's not worth the risk."

"No, and if you did manage to blow a hole big enough for the road I'd hate to have this young mountain perched above it."

Denny walked over to the precipice edge and looked down at the crowd of workmen below. They had all stopped work, the labourers leaning on their shovels or picks, the driver of the bulldozer leaning from his cab. Even Lucien was staring upwards. Denny had a strange feeling of insecurity, an insubstantial flutter in his stomach. If he slipped and fell . . . It would only need a small push. He turned quickly, but the native foreman, an Elgeyo, was still looking into the fissure. He remembered his words to Mohammed, "I trust no one," and he was saddened that the affection he had felt for the blacks only a few weeks ago should have deteriorated to this. He said as the P.C. came to join him, "Do you think I can find enough width below?"

The P.C. said, "I've been thinking about that. You'll have to push out into the donga, of course. The question is—can you shore it up enough to stand when the rains come?"

"It would be a gamble," Denny said. "It might come off. Only I'd like to be sure." The road was so important to him that he couldn't rest with this unproved link. In the autumn rains, as he knew, the bed that was now lined with dry stones, debris and young saplings would be the channel for a roaring, irresistible torrent.

"You could build a wall."

"A wall?"

"Flank your road with a retaining wall of concrete, six feet high. You'd be safe enough then."

Denny was moved to enthusiasm, and his fist, thumping the palm of the other hand, struck twenty years off his age. "Of course. That's it." He gave a little jig of triumph. "Of course!"

The P.C. smiled. "You'll need a good lot of concrete. Mohammed should be able to supply it. Let me know if you're stuck."

They started to move down the steep hill to the valley, sliding from tree to tree, stopping to rest and talk every few minutes. In one of these halts, Denny said, "Mohammed will be able to supply it. There's precious little he hasn't got in those old shacks of his."

The P.C. laughed. "I know. It's amazing—like a conjuring trick. You wonder where he can keep it all." He asked, "Has he been looking after you all right?"

"Like a father. There's nothing I've been kept waiting for. Of course, I know, it's a good contract for him, but he's really put himself out. I'm grateful. I told him so today."

"He must have taken a liking to you."

"That's what he says."

It wasn't until they had scrambled within jumping distance of the road that Denny realised that the P.C. hadn't asked one question about Mohammed's visit. Before, Lucien's gentle malice had goaded him to silence. Now he wanted to explain. "He came up here this morning—you saw his car."

The P.C. seemed more interested in the tree he was grasp-

ing than in Denny's statement, but he said, "Oh yes. What did he want?"

Denny grasped a branch and measured the distance he must jump to the road. "I don't know really. I think he came to bring me some whisky." He swung out over the road. For a few moments he was hanging like a boy in mid-air. He said, "I told him I didn't want any."

As they walked back towards the camp, he had a return of the sense of well-being which had come to him intermittently from the morning when the first guide pickets had been driven into the long grass by Venner's Gorge. At dawn, waking to Ali's soft shake, rising on one elbow, the free hand clasping a mug of scalding tea; the grey infinite distance across the valley as he watched the first tinge of light over the Mau; at tiffin-break with the single exquisite glass of whisky, and the road another hundred yards towards completion: but most of all it had come to him at evening when he had washed the red dust from his naked body, when he had eaten, and sunk at last in the rickety comfort of his chair. Then he could see his achievement in perspective: Barbara; the road; happiness and rest. He only needed the P.C.'s friendship for complete happiness. Now, it seemed he had even that.

He stopped in surprise as he saw the old bull-nosed Morris steaming up over the hill. Three cars in one day! His gladness was mingled with embarrassment as he saw that Barbara was driving and that she was alone. He hadn't seen her since his enforced stay at her farm. That was three weeks ago—nearly four—and despite the warm closeness of intimacy he felt embarrassed now to greet her as a lover—at least in public.

But Barbara apparently had no such qualms. She stopped the car by the wire, jumped out and ran to fling her arms round his chest. Conscious of the P.C. and Lucien who were standing only a few yards away, Denny felt a hot flush spreading up his neck.

She was crying, "Darling, darling. Thank God you're all



right." She pressed her head against his shoulder. "When I heard—in Manake—— Oh, I was terrified. They said you were all right, only—I had to make sure." She disengaged herself slowly, conscious of his embarrassment, and as he saw her eyes wide and ingenuous as a child's, he felt a flood of protective love. He turned to the P.C., who was smiling kindly and apparently without surprise.

He said, "I want you to know, sir—we haven't told anyone. . . ." He put his arm round her cool shoulders, "Barbara Stanhope and I are going to be married."

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### 1

HE STOOD WITH ONE ARM ROUND HER SHOULDER as the staff car disappeared into the valley. Soon it was gone, but the screen of red dust hung in the still air like a warning flag. Through her thin blouse he could feel the softness of her arm. She shivered, and, looking down, he saw her worried face.

"What's the matter?"

She smiled and shook her head.

He knew better than to force her reticence. Along the floor of the Rift everything was sharply delineated and marked by shadow, like the landmarks on an aerial photograph. He saw it all as a battlefield, a festering arm of Africa, where the black medicine and the white had erupted in cruelty. The circular palisades of villages were like scabs on the dry skin of the plain; the dazzling white, the pink, the blue of the lake, were some monstrous growth; the road and the cloud of dust, which lingered still, were like red open scars.

He turned up the hill, "Would you like to see how far we've got?"

"Of course." She took his arm and walked readily enough round the camp, but it was plain that her thoughts were not on the road nor, at the moment, with her lover. A workman ambled past, splay-footed, grinning, and wearing a brief shirt but nothing else. Barbara didn't seem to notice.

When they reached the dappled shadows of the cedar trees, Denny stopped and put his hand on her shoulder. "What's the matter?" She didn't answer or raise her head,

so he tilted her chin, forcing her to meet his eyes. "What's worrying you?"

"It's nothing really. I'm just silly."

Remembering the weeks they had spent apart, weeks when fear of her mother, natural caution, common sense could have worked, unhampered, on her judgment, he panicked. "You've not changed your mind?"

"Changed my mind?"

"You still want to marry me?"

She clasped him tightly round the waist. "Oh, yes, yes, yes. How could you ever doubt . . . ?"

"Is it . . . ?" He fumbled awkwardly for a way of expressing it. "That night—in your bedroom . . . you're not afraid . . . ?"

"No." She lowered her eyes. "I've thought a lot about that. We were wrong, of course."

"There's no 'of course' about it."

"It was my fault entirely. I only hope . . . I wanted you so much. I wanted to show how I love you—without reservations."

He pressed her head into his neck. He said, "I haven't seen you or had a chance to talk to you since that night. I must tell you. . . ." He looked helplessly across the road to the thick bushes and flowering thorns at the foot of the ravine as though he might find there some inspiration for what he had to say. "That night, being with you, did something to me—for me—you'll never understand. For a long time—since my father died, and then, later, when—someone let me down—well, nothing seemed to matter. I suppose I just didn't care any more. Drink and . . . Well, you've heard it all. . . ."

The pressure of her arms round his waist was the gauge of her understanding.

"When we were together I gained something—new interest, new hope. I'm different now—a whole man again. You'll never understand. . . ." He bogged down in his lack of words.

She said, "There's no need to tell me all this, darling. I think, if the truth were known, we were both lost. We both needed someone. . . ."

Denny said, "I've been wanting to tell you this for three weeks only I've been so busy. . . ." Realising how superficial this might sound, he went on doggedly, "This road . . . I've worked like a nigger. It isn't that I haven't longed to see you, but this is important, too; in fact, it's all tied up somehow with that night."

She smiled at him. "You don't have to tell me that. I understand."

There was an air of joyfulness up the ravine where some stubborn obstacle—a tree root or a boulder—had been moved at last. The deep roar of the bulldozer was followed by a ragged cheer, laughter, high-pitched banter. Pick-axes clinked enthusiastically in the breach. From the pleasant shade of the cedar trees Denny could look out on to the pitiless glare of the hill. He was at rest.

She said at last, "The reason I was worried just now was what you said to the P.C."

"About marrying you?"

"Yes." She looked away, shamefacedly. "Oh, I know you'll think me a coward. I was so proud when you told him that—but so afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Of what mother will say, what she may do."

"Well, let's face it. What can she do?"

She drew into herself. "Oh—you don't know. She's so strong, such a determined old woman. . . ."

"I know, but——"

"Now you've told the P.C., everyone will know about it."

"Of course. You weren't going to keep it secret?" He could feel his temper rising.

"No, darling. Don't be angry with me. I'm only afraid . . . mother will hear about it from someone else. She'll be furious."

"Well, let's avoid that. Let's tell her."

She looked at him in the defenceless way he found irresistible. "Would you come with me?"

"Come with you?" For a moment he was disconcerted. He hadn't bargained on this. He thought quickly. Palethorpe would be back tomorrow. There was a long stretch of open ground beyond the bluff—sufficient for a day's stint. "Yes," he said, "I'll be glad to come. Tomorrow."

## 2

As it happened Palethorpe came back earlier than he had expected. Denny had told him to spend the night in Manake, if necessary, and he had fully expected the boy to take advantage of a soft bed, an evening at the bar. But before the day's work was over, when Denny was driving in the pickets for the following day, a lorry drove into the compound and Palethorpe came energetically up the ravine.

"So, you're back?" He grinned at the boy who had saved his life. "Have they closed down the clubs?"

"I wanted to get back," Palethorpe said, "after last night. I thought, if there's any more trouble I may be of help."

"You certainly helped last night," Denny said. Squatting at the end of the line of pickets, he placed another carefully in the ground and held it in position as Nderi, the assistant foreman, hammered it home. He could hardly fail to notice the improvement in Palethorpe's morale. On the spur of the moment the boy had acted heroically, the quick action, almost without thought, had succeeded, and his life had been changed. Any other reaction—a momentary hesitation, the gun pointing a little more to the right or left—would have meant failure and an irredeemable sense of inefficiency. If this were the margin between bravery and cowardice. . . . Like most naturally brave men, Denny set little store on courage, but he was glad that Palethorpe had proved him-

self. He sat back on his haunches, squinting down the line of pickets. "This is as far as you'll get." He rose stiffly and beat some of the dust from his shorts. He asked, "Do you think you can manage by yourself tomorrow?"

Palethorpe looked startled and then pleased, appreciating the compliment. He said, "I'm sure of it, sir. You don't have to worry."

"I'll be back by the evening," Denny said, and then unnecessarily, "I'm going up to the Stanhope farm."

Palethorpe removed the head of the theodolite and packed it in its leather case. He said shyly, "I heard, sir, in town—about your engagement. I'd like to offer my congratulations."

"You heard!" Remembering Barbara's fears he had a moment of disquiet. If the news were already round Manake . . . ! But surely the old lady would not hear, not before tomorrow. He said, "How the dickens could you know! I've only told one person, and that was a few hours ago."

"Lucien told me, sir—at least, he was talking to some fellows in the club."

Of course. That was a dangerous thing to do, to forget Lucien. He said, "I'll have to be off at the crack of dawn. You'll find everything laid on. Nderi here knows the drill." He pointed down the straight line of the ravine. "You can see—it's a fairly straightforward day's work."

The workmen had all gone down to the camp. Under the trees an unnatural stillness settled for a few minutes, and then, as nature returned, the jungle noises began. Bullfrogs tried tentatively a few hoarse calls, a hyena yackered on the hillside, and the antelope moved uneasily up the donga. "It'll soon be dusk," Denny said. "We'd best go down." Already the air was filling with insects so that, under the trees, all peace was destroyed.

"I was studying the map," Palethorpe said, "in your tent. You've made such progress we should be finished in time."

"In time?"

"Before the rains come."

Denny smiled. "So you've heard about that, too." He stumbled wearily and caught his shoulder on the theodolite stand which Palethorpe was carrying. "Sorry!" It was always like this. So much to do—ration returns, daily reports, the trivial complaints and pleas of his workmen—when all he wanted to do was to wash, rinse the dust from his throat, and fall into bed. He said, "If I can clear the escarpment before the rains I'll be satisfied."

"We'll do that, sir, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless *they* make a determined effort."

"There's that, of course. If they're going to make a real attack, it won't come until we're well up the ravine." He asked good-naturedly, "You're not frightened?"

The boy shook his head decisively. "No, sir. I reckon we'll be ready for them. We'll give the bastards what for."

"There are other difficulties," Denny said. "If you've studied the plan you'll have seen them. At one point, a quarter of a mile from here, there's a hell of a gradient. We'll have to blast, I reckon, and level it as best we can."

"And there's a cutting, sir, where you'll have to cross the river. Were you going to bridge it?"

"Have to, I suppose. I didn't want to—a bridge is always vulnerable—but if we make a good solid job . . ." He said, "You were right about the time I'd set myself. I'm going to reach the highlands before the rains come, or bust."

"And I'm with you, sir, all the way." Palethorpe added ingenuously, "I've bet ten bob on it."

Denny grinned at him, the pink perspiring face, bush shirt stained with sweat. "Have you, bedad! And who'd be betting against us?"

"Why, it was——" Palethorpe began, and then hesitated. He said, "It was one of the chaps."

Lucien, of course.

They walked down the margin of the road to avoid the dust, and came out of the trees where the hills sloped away

to the camp clearing and the stony foothills above the valley. It was the hour of dusk and the mountain was settled in beauty. Above the western escarpment the sky was heavy with colour, purple and orange and maroon, pressing on the shoulder of the hill like a gigantic cloak. Across the floor of the valley darkness had already settled except where some bright landmarks such as Flamingo Lake still retained their identity. On the nearer hill there was peace. Inside the protecting fence the little community settled down for the night. The neat rows of tents, the bulldozer under its tarpaulin, the stores compound, the water cart and the three-ton lorry huddled as close as possible to the centre of the encampment. And the centre of it all was marked by a blazing wood fire which threw a great disc of light across the ground to reveal the squatting, eating, chattering shadows of the natives.

Seeing it all Denny had an inward glow of happiness. This was the correct order of things; this was the Africa he loved. When he reached the tent he pulled off his shirt, sticky with sweat, and his trousers and socks, and stood naked over the canvas bowl of water Ali had prepared. He plunged his hands into the water and flung it over his face, his chest, his head. Tiredness trickled away with the dust. He said, "There was no need for you to come back tonight. I expected you to stay, but," and the sentence came out spasmodically, as he rubbed a towel across his body, "I'm glad that you did decide to come back."

"I wanted to come," Palethorpe said, and he, too, sounded at one with the evening. "I know how you feel about the road, sir. I want to help."

Ali was coming from the cookhouse with two steaming plates of dinner. On the uneven ground his feet explored each careful footstep.

"I saw friend Mohammed this morning," Palethorpe said, and something in the tone warned Denny that a confession was coming.

Denny said, "I know. He was up here today."



"He was?" Was it fear or only shyness that caused the quaver in his voice? "Did he say anything about me?"

"He said you told him about last night."

"Is that all?"

They watched Ali trying to walk steadily with his two plates. When he was half-way across the camp he stopped and turned back.

Palethorpe said with a rush, "I wonder, sir . . . Could I tell you something . . . something about myself you ought to know?"

Denny was struggling into a clean shirt. He laughed. "What's this? A confession?"

"In a way."

"All right," Denny said. "You've got a few minutes grace before Ali can get here with the dinner."

The boy began nervously, "I don't know how much you know, sir—how much Lucien has told you." As Denny didn't answer he went on, "I came out here, as you know, straight from university—that is, except for a short spell at the Government school. I was pretty raw. The trouble was—I've thought a lot about this—I was a boy one day, the next I was given all the responsibilities of a man."

"You don't have to tell me this," Denny said kindly. "I've been through it all. I know what you mean," and indeed he could remember clearly his first months in Kenya, the searching period as a probationer under D. C. Matheson: the lonely safaris with only a tribal policeman for company, the tax collections, the tribunals, trying to administer white man's justice to a primitive people whose rules of right and wrong were often as strange as the penalties which seemed to them proper. Why hang a murderer, they argued, when a heavy fine would be much more practical as a recompense to the dead man's relations? It was only when he began to understand the native mind that he could meet their arguments with their own logic.

"I suppose the truth is," Palethorpe went on, "I wasn't prepared for it. If there had been no trouble out here, I'd

have settled down long before this. Only—I came out into a state of emergency.”

“I know.”

“I saw one or two killings, and then my own chief was murdered. I’m afraid—well—I panicked.”

Denny did not look at him as he sat in the canvas chair, tying his laces. “Older men than you have been scared,” he said. “There’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

“There was no one to talk to. I was miserable and ashamed, and scared all the time.” He said, “I started to drink.”

“Because you were afraid?”

“Because I was afraid.”

Noticing the sudden heightening of embarrassment, Denny attributed it wrongly to the confession. Because he had never thought of himself as a drunkard—he had only drunk as a mark of contempt for the white tabus—he could not understand that anyone could be embarrassed to discuss drunkenness with him. He said helpfully, “That’s an expensive business.”

“So I found, sir. Our own ration isn’t much, even if I had received it all. I went to Mohammed, who would supply me with as much as I wanted—at a price.”

“So you ran into debt?”

The boy looked out across the valley. It was quite dark now. “I was a fool, sir. Instead of stopping, trying to get out of trouble, I drank myself deeper and deeper into it. Mohammed encouraged me, of course—up to a point. Then he clamped down—cut off supplies and threatened to sue me for the money I owed.”

“The devil he did! He was bluffing, of course.”

“So I found out, sir, today.”

Denny stood up, clean and refreshed. A pleasant breeze was blowing up the hill. He asked, “What happened down there today?”

“I told him, sir, that I didn’t want any more of his whisky, that I’d pay him off over the next few months.”

“What did he say to that?”

“He tried to threaten me again. Said he’d report me to you.”

“Yes?”

“I told him to go to the devil.”

Denny grinned. “You’ll have to pay him, of course.”

“I intend to do so.”

“But—I’m glad you had the guts to stand up to him.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### 1

HE AWOKE WITH A SENSE OF RESOLVE. Sitting on the end of his bed with the mug of tea which Ali had just brought, he looked through the tent-flaps at the dark valley and thought of what he must do. Because of Barbara he had turned gladly again to the white community he had once despised. He wanted to be accepted, both for her sake and for his new-found peace of mind, which he knew was too valuable to lose. This was a turning-point in his life. He recognised that. Fate, he thought, was—at least temporarily—on his side. The move to this new area where he was not known, the P.C.'s friendship, the boy Palethorpe needing a friend and example, Barbara needing a lover: the whole chain of circumstances seemed designed to draw him back to his own people. Although he had lost nothing of his affection for the native, he wanted to be accepted again by the whites. But the wish was one thing; fulfilment, another. It was like applying for membership of a club from which you had once been blackballed. For this reason he had to move circumspectly with Mrs. Stanhope. Her enmity could ruin all his plans.

The curtain was lifting from the valley as he drove down the laterite road. Sunlight was already touching the upper fringes of the Mau, but it was cold on this eastern slope, and there was drifting mist in the valley. He drove slowly, enjoying the satisfaction of travelling down the road, which he had planned and worried over and torn from the bare hillside. Turning at Venner's Gorge he stopped for a few minutes until the driving spray covered his windscreen. Here Palethorpe had been tested. Farther on where the road flanked Flamingo Lake he looked down the fork road

to Banare. The pink belt of flamingoes, a hundred yards wide, stretched round the dazzling white margin of the lake. There he had stood with Barbara while Ali tinkered with the old Morris, and Ian Stanhope and Palethorpe had sheltered with bantering good-humour beneath the podocarp trees.

And then as he passed the outskirts of Manake he remembered how he had arrived there not much later in the day than this, but dusty and unkempt and crazy for a drink. You could measure time in weeks and months, or you could measure it by experience. Truly he had found himself in those limitless weeks since his arrival.

Far out of Manake, on the valley road, he came to the rough track he had followed mistakenly on that first morning, the track where Baker had been killed, the track to the Stanhope farm. Turning, winding, round the precipice edges, lurching from one pot-hole to another, he felt a further glow of pride for his own road. He charged in top gear at the steep gradient which led to the clearing where he had first seen Barbara. Bending over the wheel he could see to the top of the precipice and, remembering her pathetic figure ready to plunge, he felt a pin-prick of frustration. She hadn't told him, even in their night of intimacy, how she had been driven to this extreme, and it was like a small flaw in their relationship, a withholding of trust.

On the upper slopes he passed some native villages, each enclosed in its palisade of thorns, and higher still, when the radiator was beginning to boil, he came suddenly on to the White Highlands.

It was certainly a lovely country. From the scrubby fringe of the escarpment, there was downland, fertile and open and wind-swept, stretching to the far distant forests. Cattle wandered there, herds of pedigree Friesian, a thousand strong. Merino sheep had usurped the pasturage where buffalo had once grazed, and the sheepdog had superseded the lion. Occasionally a clump of graceful cedars broke the

assault of wind and sun, and the rambling farmhouse he could now see was protected by a semi-circle of trees. The Stanhope farm was somewhere away to his left.

As he jolted along a side track he saw a horseman riding along the hill. He stopped the car and shouted.

"I say. Can you direct me to the Stanhopes'?"

The horseman wheeled leisurely and came down the hill.

"Can you direct me to the Stanhopes'?"

"Aye."

It wasn't until the rider tilted his bush hat that Denny recognised Uncle Angus. Somehow he looked smarter than before, but despite the change of clothes he was still at one with the horse, the gun, the rolling, open hillside.

Denny grinned. "I'm sorry. I didn't recognise you."

"Recognised you," the old man said, and then, non-committally, "We've been expecting ye."

Denny waited, expecting him to explain, but the old man was intent with a cigarette packet and a match. He made a brief, ungracious gesture. "Cigarette?"

"No, thanks."

Denny had the impression of embarrassment, as though Uncle Angus wanted to say something—possibly some kindly word of advice—and didn't know how to set about it. "How are things up here?"

"Ye mean the farming?"

"Yes."

"Weel." The old man sucked hardships in with the cigarette smoke. "Ye'll no see times like we had a few years back, when it paid ye to stay in farming."

"What's the matter? Are the crops bad?"

Uncle Angus shook his head regretfully. "No, ye can't say that. Pyrethrum, now, that no' so bad."

"The crops I've seen have looked all right."

"Oh aye. We'll get the yield, I'll grant ye." He leant over to pat the bay gelding, which was being irritated almost beyond endurance by the flies. He asked, "Have ye read what the Yanks are doing?"

"I know they are refusing to buy extract, but after all—if they have their own extraction plants . . ."

"Oh aye," Uncle Angus gloomily conceded the point. "And the Japs. Did ye know they're cutting in?"

"I heard about it. But," he raised a tolerant hand, "there's such a demand, at least you'll never starve."

Angus shook his head, as though this was more than he was prepared to admit. "There's something else I heard. The Yanks are starting to grow the stuff themselves—in a big way. South America, if I remember—Ecuador."

"Ah, well."

"We should've stuck to cattle, like I always said. Cheese, butter, milk—ye don't have to wonder whether they'll sell. With the butter factory in Manake. . . ."

"What made you start with pyrethrum?"

"It was Jessie, my sister. She's the one who gives orders round here. She's always the one who knows best." The old man edged his horse over to the car. He continued in a low voice, as though there might be some eavesdropper even on this bare downland. "But I tell ye, laddie, she's not so godalmighty clever. Take the lassie now, young Barbara. Anyone would think it would be a kindness to see her decently married. After what she's been through, the stigma, which is no fault of hers, be'ing thrown up at every conceivable opportunity—until the lassie's so browbeaten she don't know what's right and what's wrong. To hear my sister Jessie speak, the lassie herself is somehow to blame. . . ."

"I'm sorry," Denny said, "but I can't follow all this. What stigma?"

But the old man had obviously decided how much he was prepared to say. He was already riding away as he said, "Stand up to her, son. If ye want to marry the girl I'd say to hell with the old woman." He kicked the horse into a trot and shouted over his shoulder, "To hell with her, I say!"

## 2

He realised that he hadn't after all discovered the road to the Stanhope farm, but he continued on the track he had been following, relying on his sense of direction, and after passing through vast fields of pyrethrum which covered the hillside with a white carpet as far as the eye could see, he came suddenly on to open pasture land again and saw on the edge of the forest the white and black farmstead against the trees. There was no sign of movement in the grounds. A small Kipsigi boy who had been watching the cattle stared at him open-mouthed, but the house in its protective fence of barbed wire might have been untenanted. He watched uneasily as he drove. At least, he expected, Barbara would come to meet him, but there was no one. He had to open the gate himself and shut it again after he had driven through. He parked the car in the shadow of a barn and climbed the wooden steps to the veranda in front of the house.

The door opened almost before he had knocked, and Joseph, the Kikuyu houseboy, was beckoning him inside.

"Come in, Mr. Denny. I've been expecting you." Mrs. Stanhope's voice, chilled of all friendliness, warned him that she already knew and to this extent his task of winning her over would be even harder than he had expected. He came in warily, fixing her position on the chaise-longue, while his eyes grew accustomed to the sudden gloom.

"Good morning." He looked carefully round, but there was no one else in the room. "I hoped to see Barbara," he explained.

"I understood you were coming to see me."

"That's true, only it's about Barbara I want to speak. If she were here . . ."

"She's in her room."

"There's nothing wrong? She's not ill?"



"Her health is all right—I can't answer for her reason."

He took a chair, without being asked, and sat facing her across the corner of the table. He said, "Mrs. Stanhope, it's obvious that you know already, and I'm sorry—sorry, that is, that you should have heard it from someone else before we had the chance to tell you."

"It's good of you to tell me at all—not that it makes any difference."

"Of course it makes a difference. You, her mother, should have known about this before anyone."

"I didn't mean that. I meant it won't make any difference to the outcome. Obviously you can't marry my daughter."

He sat forward on the edge of his chair, while the hot flush spread up his face and neck. Patience in an argument was not one of his virtues, but he disciplined himself now to calmness. He looked down at the bars of light, thrown from the latticed window across the floor. He counted them deliberately. One-two-three-four-five. He asked, "Why is Barbara in her room?"

"I sent her there."

He said, "Mrs. Stanhope! You can't act like this. This is your own daughter, a grown woman. How can you treat her like a naughty child?"

She was sitting bolt-upright, grasping the handle of her stick, and her eyes, it seemed to him, were afire with inward malice. "I know how to treat my own children, Mr. Denny."

He said, "You realise she could leave if she wanted to? She could come with me now and we could be married in Manake today."

The old lady said malevolently, "Just let her try! I agree—she's such a poor infatuated fool she might do anything. But just let her try!"

"I don't see," Denny said mildly, "that there's much you could do."

As the old lady's temper rose she lost even her veneer of good manners. Spitting vindictively over her stick she

reminded him of some of the old cronies with grievances to air at the tribunals. There was one in every location. She said, "If she leaves this house against my will she'll leave without a penny, without a stitch of clothing other than what she's wearing. I'll not give her even a suitcase. She'll walk out as she is, and, by the Lord, I swear she'll never come back."

Denny watched sadly, feeling his own anger settling to pity. She was so grotesque that he seriously feared for her sanity. He said, "You can't honestly believe, Mrs. Stanhope, that this sort of attitude will achieve anything. As far as I'm concerned, any money you could leave her doesn't mean a thing—if that's what you're thinking. Obviously we would much sooner have your blessing, but it's obvious, too, that we can easily get along without it."

For a few moments their eyes challenged across the table. Neither would give way. Mrs. Stanhope's white face, her lips twisting with passion, gave Denny the advantage. While he remained calm she couldn't win. A bar of sunlight had struck across her eyes so that he could see there all the hatred and intolerance. She's mad, he thought, remembering other Europeans he had seen with just these symptoms. The thin air of the highlands often played strange tricks on the white settlers. And she had been out here fifty years. He asked, "Won't you tell me why you are so opposed to our marriage?"

She looked at him even more strangely then. There was the cunning of madness in her expression as she said harshly, "I don't consider you a suitable person."

"I'm sorry." For a moment he felt confused, feeling instinctively that this was not the real reason. But he had to go on. "I dare say you've heard a good many things against me. Most of them may well have been true. But," he gestured helplessly, "can't you see that this will make all the difference? I can understand your doubts, but when I met Barbara . . ." He stopped in embarrassment and then added simply, "I'm a different man."

She said, "You're not a suitable person for my daughter."

Out on the pastures a cow was bellowing to be milked. A dog barked, and a black boy called to it from down the hill. Could this kind of madness be inherited? Denny wondered. The doubt threw a shadow on his conviction until, remembering Barbara's scared eyes, her yielding lips, he knew that she could never harden to this kind of intolerance. He asked, "Would you have been happy if Barbara had decided to marry someone more—suitable?"

It was a shot in the dark, but it scored a point. "No," the old lady shouted, "she'll never marry—never."

"Is there any reason . . . ?" Denny began, but she silenced him by banging her stick on the floor. "She'll never marry. She knows she mustn't marry."

*Mustn't* marry. Truth was throwing out tentative hands. He felt that he was on the edge of the secret, which he couldn't see clearly enough to grasp. He remembered Uncle Angus—"the stigma . . . no fault of hers", Barbara swaying on the brink of suicide, being kept like a bad child in her room. 'She *mustn't* marry.' Then, because he loved her, he felt a cold anger rising against this inhuman mother. Because of *her* madness, Barbara must suffer. He leant across the table until their faces were only a few inches apart. He said slowly, "I'm a simple man, Mrs. Stanhope. Maybe I'm not much of a catch for your daughter. Maybe I've done a good many things in my time that you'd be ashamed of. But when it comes to wickedness I can't begin to compete with you. There's some malicious hold you've got over Barbara I don't understand. I'm not sure I want to understand. But you—you're supposed to be a religious woman!"

"I am, I am." It was the first break he had seen in her control.

"Religious! Why you haven't even the makings of a Christian!"

"It's not true! I've always lived by the Good Book." Frantically, almost in tears, she looked round for her Bible

as though, with that in her hands, she could defy the devil.

"Tolerance! Love! Have you ever spared one thought of love for your daughter?"

She stared at him almost in terror, as though the ugly truth which she had suppressed all these years had suddenly pushed irresistibly into her consciousness. She said in a harsh whisper, "She's not my daughter."

If the words had not been so clearly spoken he would have assumed that he had not heard correctly. "I don't understand."

She said again with a wretched abandon, "She's not my daughter."

"But . . ." He still couldn't take it in. "She's so like your husband. There's a distinct resemblance. It's not possible. . . ."

"Like my husband—yes."

"You mean he is her father?"

"Oh yes."

"But you. . . ."

"I'm not her mother."

Denny leant back without troubling to hide his perplexity. He had found truth at last but still he couldn't understand it.

She said bitterly, "You're so smug, Mr. Denny, judging me without the facts. How do you think we should look if you married the girl, and then found out later on that she's illegitimate?"

"Illegitimate!" The outline was becoming clearer now. He asked, "She knows, of course?"

"She knows." For the first time, he saw her relax, the face lines sagging, the body leaning for support. She began to speak again with eyes closed to sharpen the dim outline of her memory. "My husband was always a weakling. Without me he'd be a smallholder still, scratching a living from a few acres of soil. All this house, the barns, the herd of Friesian, the rich crops, he owes to me. I guided him. I made him a rich man—and he rewarded me like that."

In the room above someone was walking about. The temperature was rising in the living-room, despite the ceiling fans, and a sudden gust of wind disturbed the cushions. "There was a girl we had out here," Mrs. Stanhope continued. "She was a distant relation. Her parents died. We brought her here out of charity."

"Was she Barbara's mother?"

"How they managed it without me finding out I don't know to this day. It wasn't until she was six months pregnant I began to suspect." She gave a sudden keen of lament. "We were a respectable family. There were other godless people who would have been glad to hold that over us." She showed a return of spirit as she added, "I didn't give them that satisfaction."

"What happened?"

"I gave out that it was *I* who was expecting a child. For three months I didn't leave the house."

"And the girl?"

"*She* didn't leave the house, I can assure you. She was locked in her room."

He felt horror rising in his spine. The wretched girl, Barbara's mother, a prisoner for three endless months: the terror of loneliness, fear of the coming birth, the actual delivery. Small wonder that Barbara was inhibited. He asked, "And the baby was born?"

"She was born upstairs, in the room the wretched girl had occupied ever since I found out."

He said, "It's a terrible story. I never thought I'd be shocked, but . . ." He said, "I still can't understand how you kept it secret. Didn't your servants know?"

"There was only one. That was what I arranged. There was only one houseboy."

He had a sudden horrible intuition. "Was his name N'joro?"

She ignored the question entirely, but, as her eyes were still closed, he couldn't be sure that she had heard. He shivered, despite the growing heat. Then he put the

question which he knew he must ask, however much he feared the answer. "What happened to the mother? Is she still alive?"

"Alive!" The old lady was suddenly upright again, her eyes wildly triumphant, her skeleton hands clasped as though to throttle. "She paid the penalty of her wickedness." Then the lingering enjoyment of two words, "She died."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

HE WAITED IN THE GOLDEN SHADOWS of a podo tree, a mile from the farm, knowing that she would come. He hadn't cared to force the issue by demanding to see her, and he knew intuitively that this was the way she would prefer. From the bank where he was sitting he could see the sun-drenched hill, the languid cattle with their small black guardian. The farm was hidden by a false crest. Below, the mountain sloped quickly away to the belt of scrub along the top of the escarpment, an area of tall grass, of brambles, of whistling thorn, with an occasional cluster of native huts surrounded by rough shambas of maize and wheat and finger millet. The radiator cap of his car, which he had left in the sun, was glittering like an arc lamp.

When he turned again the black boy had disappeared, but he returned in a few minutes from the line of trees. Denny stood up suspiciously, feeling for his gun, but there was no sound above the hum of insects and the lowing of cattle against the wind. The boy squatted on the ground and began to pick at the sole of his foot; his intent face, the ragged toga, the wire-spring hair—could they belong to a murderer? He shifted angrily because he seemed to have lost the power to trust.

A quarter of an hour had passed before he saw her over the brow of the hill. She was riding at a canter and looking intently on all sides, as though he might already have grown tired of waiting. She was riding straight down the hill, away from the car, until he stepped out into the open and waved.

"I waited here. I thought you'd come." He helped her to dismount and watched as she tethered the horse beneath the trees. "I didn't want to upset your mother any more." Mother! he thought. She's not her mother. There's nothing for her to fear—no loyalty, no bond of love.

She came with a curious air of restraint through the filter-

ing sunlight. Her face was intense, searching, pathetic. "Did she tell you our—secret?"

"Yes."

She faltered before his gaze and started to flush. "I hope she didn't make it sound too horrible."

"It is horrible. There's no getting away from that." Because the fact of illegitimacy meant nothing to him he couldn't understand why she should still be afraid.

She said in a low voice, "I knew you'd hate it. That's why I didn't dare to tell you."

"It had to come out some time," Denny said. "You could have trusted me."

"I suppose so."

"What I can't understand," he said, still trying to sort his chaotic thoughts, "is how she could have done it."

To his surprise she began to cry: not noisily or with much show, but from some quiet well of wretchedness.

He took her in his arms and felt her yield to his body like a tired child. "Don't cry. There's nothing to cry about."

She muttered, "You can't judge her. She was so young, and, I expect, lonely. My father was handsome. . . ."

"I wasn't talking about your mother," Denny said, "I meant Mrs. Stanhope."

She brightened at once, like the sun freed of cloud. "You mean—you don't blame my mother?"

"Blame her! I can only feel pity. When I think of what she must have suffered . . . alone and friendless. . . . That's why I said it was horrible."

"And now that you know what I am—you don't feel differently?" He could feel the tension of her body as she waited for his answer.

"My dear, as if that could make any difference!"

She was really crying now, from relief and gladness, and, holding her close, he waited for emotion to run out. Over her head he could see to the foot of the valley, a patch of blue and white where Flamingo Lake showed round a buttress of rock, the thick greenery of Venner's Gorge, the



stubby red pencil which was all he could see of his road. Clearly marked in the sunlight were the white and brown buildings of Banarè with Mohammed's store like an overgrown appendix to the east.

When she had recovered they sat side by side in the shadows beneath the podo tree. The air was full of the clean tang of cedars grilling in the sun, and the bells of the small cowherd were the music of enchantment.

Denny said, "Now that I know, our whole problem is so much easier. In fact there's no problem at all."

"I don't know. . . ."

"Well, it's simple enough. If she's not your mother there's even less reason why she should stop you. No reason at all why you should listen if she tries."

Barbara said, "It's not so simple as that. I wish it was. Oh, if only we could go away now—today—and be married as we want without any fuss."

"Well, why not? I can't see any reason." As she shook her head he persisted, "Let's go away. Let's be married now." He added naively, "We needn't be away long. Palethorpe could manage the road."

She laughed with affection, "You and your road!"

"Well, I can't leave it altogether. And think, if we were married, of all the arguments we should save. No use your mother—Mrs. Stanhope—trying to stop a marriage that's already taken place."

Barbara rested quietly in his encircling arms, and he thought for a minute that she would agree. But she shook her head, as though tossing aside the temptation, and explained slowly, "If there were no one else to consider, darling, I'd come with you now, as I am, but there are other people. . . ."

"Who?"

"At least, there's one person—my father."

Denny said impatiently, "I'm sorry to seem unreasonable, but how does he come into it?"

Barbara said, "You don't understand my stepmother.

She's hard, intensely religious, and, if she thinks she's in the right, quite without mercy. I tell you, sometimes she frightens me."

"She frightens me," Denny said. "That's why I'm so anxious to take you away."

"Oh, there's no need to worry. She won't hurt me—not badly, I mean, because, you see, it's mainly through me that she can hurt my father."

"She's mad," Denny said.

"Yes, I think she is, a little. But she's sane enough to get what she wants, and what she wants at the moment is to keep me at home."

"But—are you going to stay there meekly because she orders it? Don't you *want* to be married?"

She clasped the crook of his arm and looked up at him. "Of course I'm not going to stay here, darling. Only I can't leave now, wondering what she can do to Daddy. You must be patient, darling. I'll find a way. As for wanting to marry you . . ." She slipped her arm round his shoulder and pulled him with her to the grass.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IT WAS A RELIEF to turn again to the road, to the simple requirements of sweat and toil and long days in the sun; but he couldn't forget Barbara for long. Secretly he was not sorry that they couldn't marry at once. The ravine was there to be conquered, the thickly wooded slopes, sombre even in the brightness of day, a constant challenge. But still he worried about her and, remembering the sordid tale of her birth, was concerned for her safety. That the old lady was mad he had no doubt. There were details from her story which festered in his brain until he could hardly remember the fact from the surmise. How did the girl die? Was a doctor called in? Thirty years ago these highland settlers had enjoyed the freedom of pioneers. Where was she buried and who attended the funeral? Above all, why was N'joro killed?

From this nightmare speculation the ascent of Kilavo Ravine seemed a straightforward operation. Yet it was never without its dangers. Twice in a few days stray shots were fired, a workman who had gone to relieve himself in the bushes disappeared in broad daylight. The Police Reserve and the Kikuyu Home Guard patrolled regularly, either from the high plateau or from the camp at the foot of the ravine, but they reported nothing and it seemed almost as though the Mau Mau were somehow aware of their coming.

In charge of the Reserve and the Home Guard was Major Stanhope, Barbara's father. He was a likeable man, bluff, easy-going and popular in command, but he had not the stubbornness for efficient leadership. He liked a routine, an order of events, which even the least intelligent of his askaris could understand. He hated anything out of the ordinary, forced marches, extra patrols—not for the trouble to himself, but so that his men should not be inconvenienced.

Denny met him outside the camp as he was returning from a long day's work. There was a patrol of five, all white farmers, well mounted and armed, with two Kipsigi boys on foot as trackers. Denny recognised Ian beside Mr. Stanhope, but the others were strangers to him. They looked hardy and sunburnt and efficient. Mr. Stanhope introduced the strangers—Jan and Pieter de Groôt, stocky, unsmiling Boers, and a rather effeminate Englishman named Villiers. They dismounted inside the compound and went over to Denny's tent for a drink. As they approached, Palethorpe, who was washing inside the tent, leapt out to welcome Ian, and while the older men stood together drinking, the two boys sidled away under a smokescreen of undergraduate slang.

"Congratulations," Mr. Stanhope said, "on your engagement. You and Barbara—the first time I've seen you. . . . I can tell you I was damned glad." He seemed shamefaced but sincere. "I'm sure . . . everything will turn out all right." There was, Denny realised, the same air of helplessness that he had noticed in Barbara, but whereas in her it was just an attractive trait, demanding protection, in him it was weakness. Perhaps he was still prejudiced by the family skeleton. Where had Stanhope been while Barbara's mother was imprisoned and dying?

"Congratulations, too, on the road," Villiers said. "It's what this goddamned area needs more than anything. It'll drive these black bastards up into the jungle and save us getting sore arses twice a week chasing shadows." The rough colonial talk came strangely from his lips.

"It'll help," Denny said, "but we're not finished yet—not by a long chalk."

"No one thought you could do it," Stanhope said.

"I was bloody sure you wouldn't," Villiers confessed. "Even to get as far as this——"

"We're a mile farther on from here," Denny said, "well up the ravine. But the worst part is still to come."

"From the ground or from attacks?"

"Both."

"You're certainly running into dangerous country as far as the Mau Mau are concerned," Stanhope said, "those thick forests on the escarpment slopes. A whole battalion could hide there—and escape after the action."

"Good place for an ambush," one of the Dutchmen admitted.

"What I can't understand," Villiers said, "is why we've not had a sniff of success. All these patrols . . . you'd think we'd find something."

"There was that Home Guard affair," Stanhope said defensively, "just up here. One was killed, another captured. You're forgetting that."

"Have a heart, old man," Villiers protested. "It was D.C. Denny here who killed the wog."

"As a matter of fact it was Palethorpe," Denny said, "but the fact remains—and I'm glad you've mentioned it—that is the only success you've had, at least up this way."

"Maybe they're biding their time," Stanhope said.

"Or maybe there's a leak in security." As Denny spoke he knew that he had only said what was in all their minds, and he knew, too, that they would never forgive him for having said it. The de Groot brothers stared without expression over the resting camp; Villiers swilled the whisky in his glass.

"That's a pretty risky statement," Mr. Stanhope protested, but his eyes flickered away before Denny's gaze.

"I don't see it like that," Denny said. "After all, if there is a leak it's better for all of us if we find out where it is. Perhaps no one is to blame. There may be some fault in the system. But obviously if you've been out—how many weeks is it now?—without even a scent of Mau Mau, and the first time you alter your plans . . ."

"It wasn't I who altered them," said Stanhope. "It was my son."

"Whoever it was, it brought results."

For the first time Denny saw Stanhope angry. Colour

drained from his face, his lips trembled, but still the eyes were not supported by a will. "It's all very well," Stanhope said sulkily, "to criticise from a distance, but there, in Manake, I've got a wall map—all this side of the valley—and precious few patrols to cover it all. You're not the only one who wants protection, you know."

The Dutchmen and Villiers were watching non-committally over their empty glasses. Impossible to guess what they were thinking. Denny thought, I've got the step-mother against me; if I antagonise the father as well . . . ! But he had to go on. He asked, "You don't mark patrols on this wall map?"

"Do you take me for a perfect fool?"

There was something in the way he said it which reminded Denny of Barbara, of the way she had flared out at him the first time they met. He relaxed and smiled. "I'm sorry. I don't want to teach you your job. As you said, it's easy enough to criticise from afar."

Stanhope was instantly mollified, but, strangely, Denny had the feeling that his companions were disappointed. They put down their glasses, one by one, on the tray which Ali had laid on the ground and shuffled towards their horses.

"Another drink?"

"No, thanks."

"No."

"No."

"I'm sure you're mistaken," Stanhope was saying. "After all, these 'Kukes' aren't exactly fools either, you know. They know the forests far better than we do, even with our trackers."

"Of course." Denny held the bridle as he mounted. "But—you might consider changing the routes again some time without warning—just on the off-chance."

"Well—I'll think about it."

"Good!" Denny smiled, and his face, still powdered with the dust of the road, cracked into unfamiliar lines of con-

ciliation. "Hope you have a good patrol." He asked, as off-handedly as possible, "How's Barbara?"

"She's all right—quite all right. She—er—sent her love." He wasn't clever enough to pass off this afterthought as the truth, and as he headed his patrol through the gap in the wire he left Denny wondering more than ever whether it was safe to leave Barbara at the farm.

The days passed. Other patrols came and searched and departed. The King's African Rifles, who were not usually responsible for this side of the mountain, arrived unexpectedly to include the ravine in a sweep towards the plateau. Ten Mau Mau were killed and four wounded. Bombers came, two long-bellied monsters flying slowly against the azure sky, to be followed minutes later by a series of explosions which shuddered down the hill and into the valley. It was reported that a British battalion would be stationed in Manake. Loyal headmen were murdered with their children, and their women were found, days later, violated and dead. The defence forces grew angry, and trigger-happy. The proportion of killed to captured lengthened: four to one, five to one. Men disappeared from the villages. Bodies, without hands, were found in the scrub. Skeletons, bleaching in the sun, might have belonged to friend or foe. And, turning angrily from the terror which spread like a disease across the lonely hills, listening with deaf ears to the rising jungle sounds, Denny pressed frantically onwards with the road.

It was a job that needed all his attention. The difficulties of terrain seemed to increase with every day. From the five hundred yards they had advanced between sunrise and sunset on the open slopes by Venner's Gorge, they were now reduced to the distance from one obstacle to another, from rock face to thicket, so that sometimes, after hard slogging hours in the airless hills, they would leave the head of the road at dusk only a few yards nearer the escarpment. The red line which had glided so quickly in the open was moving more and more slowly until, on the map, its progress

was almost imperceptible. Lucien came out with joyful commiseration and departed to spread the seed of failure round the clubs of Manake. The P.C. came and watched non-committally, as the labourers man-handled a passage through scattered rocks. Denny, almost unrecognisable from sweat and dirt and frustration, harangued like a slave-master while Palethorpe echoed his vituperation and energy farther up the valley. There was an air of bitter resolve which somehow communicated itself to the men, for they worked with more enthusiasm than the P.C. would have thought possible. But the rains were coming nearer.

The P.C. went off without saying much, but within two days another bulldozer and a tractor appeared in the camp.

Half-way through the jungle was a steep, almost precipitous slope in a narrow defile which turned out to be the most formidable obstacle of all. The gradient had to be lowered for nearly a quarter of a mile by dynamiting the rock surface and moving the displaced débris downhill to a place where the valley widened. It was a herculean task. A hundred of tons of rock were shifted, the dynamite was almost spent, and the ascent was still almost too steep to climb. Palethorpe went down at dusk and returned with more dynamite, and next morning, in the pale greyness of dawn, the work began again. For six days—almost a week—the road stood still, and then on one glorious evening the tractor climbed over the pitted rock surface. The rains had already been reported farther up the coast.

Throughout that period of endeavour the Mau Mau had been ominously quiet. Perhaps, if they could watch from the hanging forests above, they thought that the defile would never be breached, but now the workmen were through and the completion of the road to the summit seemed only a matter of time. There was one further obstacle, a high bridge across the river-bed, but beyond there was nothing more difficult than the country they had already conquered. The road, like a spear to the heart of the Mau Mau, would soon be ready.



In the camp the workmen were becoming careless of security. Denny had to arrest two sentries he found sleeping and to reprimand the foreman for taking on Kikuyu tribesmen without proper screening. Even Palethorpe seemed over-confident. The Mau Mau, Denny felt, were the more dangerous for their quietness.

The sectional Bailey bridge arrived from Nakuru. It came one evening at dusk with a party of engineers, who drove the lorries up the hill from Venner's Gorge into the barbed-wire compound, and then, after reporting to Denny, returned in their spare lorry to explore the possibilities of Manake. The steel trellises of the bridge were left without cover in the compound.

"I'll win my bet, sir. I was half afraid we might be held up for this." Palethorpe pointed his spoon at the gaunt shape above the lorry.

"I hope you're right," Denny said. "About winning your bet, I mean. I'm glad too that the bridge has come."

"On the right day! They can have it up tomorrow."

"That's the P.C.'s doing, I imagine."

Down by the fire the workmen were singing—a song about the road, verse after verse, some heroic, some comic, some obscene, as one native after another picked up the theme. A couple of pye dogs which had attached themselves to the camp nosed through the dust for hidden scraps.

"When the bridge is up," Palethorpe said, "we're as good as home."

Denny smiled through the darkness. "If we can beat the rains."

"We'll beat them, sir."

"I'd like to have your assurance."

The boy settled back into his canvas chair and belched. "Pardon!" He was at ease now and confident. The road had been a testing ground for him as well as for Denny, and now there was a comfortable relationship, almost of father and son, between them. "It's a strange thing, sir, that you, of all people, should have doubts at this stage of the game."

Earlier, when no one thought you could succeed, you seemed so sure. I tell you quite frankly, I was full of admiration."

"That was just stubbornness," Denny said, "or maybe. . . ." His thoughts trailed away. He said, "I remember when I was a boy helping my father to clear out a barn infested with rats. We went at it methodically with two terriers and a shot-gun. I had a stick. We worked our way down the barn, moving everything, turning over every clutch of straw. We heard the rats, although we couldn't see them. So did the dogs. They were almost frantic with excitement. Then there was only one corner left, and as my father moved each can, each sack, I could imagine the rats scuttling in terror farther and farther back, waiting for the moment when there could be no more hiding—when they would have to come out and fight."

The boy said quietly, "We've reached that point now."

"I think so. That's why I'm anxious. . . ." Denny stood up and looked round the wall of darkness. Only the fire broke up the night. He said uneasily, "I'll be damn glad when the bridge is up."

Palethorpe stood beside him, as though catching something of the awareness, the unexplained fears. Up in the hills a hyena yammered, and the forest stirred to a breeze. "Shall I double the guards?"

"Let's take a look round," Denny said.

They trod carefully through the darkness, across the lorry-ridged earth, past the latrines and the store tent, to the barbed-wire fence which enclosed the camp. The darkness was intense. In another hour the moon would rise, but now they could scarcely discern the deeper blackness of the escarpment, only a hundred yards away. Somewhere to their left men were talking in an undertone and a pin-prick of light glowed and dimmed, glowed and dimmed.

"Put out that cigarette!"

The light disappeared and the talking stopped.

Denny turned to his right, and started to patrol the circle

of wire. Palethorpe, one step behind him on the inside, had a revolver cocked and ready in his hand. Denny had a tommy gun slung from his shoulder. Uphill, at the highest point in the camp, they stopped. They could see nothing except the fire with its wide ellipse of light, the workmen squatting by the embers or lying full length in the margin of shadows, but there was a fine free wind coming up from the valley; behind was only an oppressive stillness.

"Everything's ready," Denny said, "providing we're alert. I don't think I'll undress. . . ."

"You really expect some trouble?"

"It'll come tonight, if it's coming at all." Remembering the defences he had prepared—the wire fence, the slit trenches, the section of tribal police—he knew that he had done all that was possible. And yet he was uneasy. If he could have been sure when the bridge would arrive he could have had protection from the Police Reserve or from the Home Guard.

"Might as well go right round."

They had walked another fifty yards to the opposite side of the camp, when Denny suddenly stopped. Palethorpe, taken by surprise, jostled into his shoulder. "What's the matter?"

Denny asked in a low voice, "Did you hear anything?"

"No."

"I thought . . . over in the wire."

They stood, shoulder to shoulder, with ears straining to distinguish one forest sound from another. As a breeze stirred, the vast canopy of branch and leaf, the cedars and podocarpus and giant thorns, set up a sinister murmuring, like the plaintive language of dead men; the undergrowth crackled—to a leopard or an antelope?—and again the hyena shrilled from the slopes. The wind died away, and the unexpected silence was as trying to the nerves as the previous sounds. Even the workmen were quiet round their fire.

"It's nothing." Denny started reluctantly to walk down-

hill. He knew that in the light of another day all this would seem rather ridiculous, but now . . . He stumbled over a tuft of grass and fell almost into the wire. As he rose carefully he saw a dark heap on the ground beneath the lowest strands. A pile of earth, a bush? Almost without thinking he reached out to make sure. And for a full ten seconds he couldn't realise what it was beneath the palm of his hand, warm and moist and breathing.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE MAN CAME SUDDENLY TO LIFE and scrambled through the last of the wire so quickly that Denny was sent sprawling. The man was up in a flash, with one hand on Denny's throat, the other raised to strike. Rolling quickly on heel and shoulder Denny lurched clear and grasped for the weapon hand. He guessed that Palethorpe was unable to see enough for a clear shot. By good fortune he grasped an arm above the wrist.

As he bent, straining against his assailant, he saw the weapon he was trying to avoid: wire cutters. Even above the urgent bid for safety he was thinking of his road, the bridge, the hole in the fence. He shouted, "For Christ's sake, sound the alarm!"

"An attack! Corporal Lamissah, an attack!" Palethorpe's voice, shrill with tension, screamed across the clearing.

With a sudden burst of anger, Denny tore away from his assailant. For a moment, long enough to grab the stock of his tommy gun, he was free, and then as the black fanatic figure closed again he brought the butt down with all the strength of his arm.

The man collapsed on the ground, and at the same time a flurry of bullets struck across the camp.

For a second there was silence; then a man screamed, and confusion flooded the camp like a tide. The workmen, suddenly apprised of their danger, and with no white man immediately to hand, panicked. One had been hit. His cries flayed at the raw nerves of his companions who ran screaming and shouting, backwards and forwards, fighting each other in the darkness. Corporal Lamissah's voice came intermittently in vain command, but he might have been shouting against one wind.

"Let's get down there," Denny cried, "before they kill themselves in panic."

"What about this——?"

"Leave him. There's no time now."

Denny went running down the hill, keeping clear of the light cast by the embers, but he was still some yards from the crowd of natives, when there was another burst of firing. More men were hit—their cries were distinguishable even above the terror and confusion, and in a moment panic had settled in a definite direction. The gate. Someone, with the wild unreasoning instinct of preservation, started to run downhill. Another followed, and before Denny could cover the few extra yards they were off in a flock towards the fence.

"Stop!" Denny ran after them, cursing. The ration tent had been trampled down in their flight, and one of the wounded men was crawling across its canvas.

At the gate there was hysteria. The sentries had fled, and the first man down, unable to open the gate, had only begun scrambling through the wire when he was caught by the stampede of his companions. There were shrieks and cries as men fought and climbed and tore themselves on the barbs. Bullets were cutting into the mass, sometimes finding a mark with a thud and a following scream, sometimes missing, to ricochet away into the darkness.

The first man was over the fence and as he ran, limping from the wounds inflicted by the wire, his companions went berserk. They were kicking, hacking, biting.

Denny wasted no time or words. He slung himself against the fence, a few yards from the gate, and raised his tommy gun. He fired a short burst over the wire.

For a moment there was stillness. "Back into the trenches," Denny shouted in Ki' Swahili. "Back into the trenches where you'll be safe."

The natives hesitated: two men were perched ludicrously on top of the wire. "Back into the trenches." In another second they would have obeyed. But at that moment the Mau Mau started firing again.

No one was hit, but the whine of bullets was enough to

bring back panic. With a cry of horror and desperation the workmen surged forward, carrying the wire before them but not breaking it. Some, caught like pinned butterflies, were screaming over and over again as the barbs tore through their flesh. The two men on top were like men riding tigers. They dared not let go.

Then, as the wire reached its limit, Denny had to act. Men were being crushed. He shouted again, "Stop! Back to the trenches!" and when no one obeyed he fired another burst from his Tommy gun. The two men on the wire scrambled back, the tide turned, and like dark ghosts the workmen disappeared towards the trenches.

Denny waited in the darkness until his judgment was cleared of anger. There was so much to do, so much to defend, and with such meagre forces. Palethorpe came to his side. "Are you all right, sir?"

"All right."

"Shall I bring in the man you slogged?"

"Hell's bells! I'd forgotten. . . . Yes, you'd better take one of the police, and some wire. See what damage was done."

"Right!"

"And, Tom——"

"Sir?"

"Tie that bastard up so he won't escape."

"Leave it to me, sir."

As Palethorpe climbed the hill, Denny walked slowly across to the wrecked store and on to his own tent. After the pandemonium the camp and the whole hillside cowered under an ominous silence. There was no more shooting, and the men in the trenches lay like dead beneath the ground. On the folding table between the two camp chairs a plate of bully beef and a mug of cold tea reminded him of his lost supper. He picked up a slice of the meat and began to chew it without hunger.

Someone was coming from the trenches. "Corporal Lamissah?"

But it was Ali.

"Are you all right, Ali?"

"Bwana, sorry I not with you. . . ." Ali collapsed and fell, crashing against his master, so that for one moment Denny thought wildly that he was going to attack. Denny knelt beside him, feeling quickly over his body. There was a gunshot wound in his thigh and another which had broken his collar bone.

"Bwana. . . ."

"It's all right, Ali. I'll leave you here . . . come back as soon as I can." He lifted the black boy in his arms and laid him on his own camp-bed.

He was half-way towards the trenches when the night was split wide open by a high-pitched, long-drawn-out scream of pain. It rose from the stillness, echoed for a moment in horror and disbelief, and died away again in stillness.

"What was that, bwana?" Corporal Lamissah came fearfully from the trench.

"The man who got over the wire," Denny said. "I guess the Mau Mau found him after all."

There were five tribal policemen armed with rifles—one had been killed at the wire—and the corporal with a Sten gun. Palethorpe had a shot-gun and a revolver. Denny had a tommy gun. There were more than fifty workmen in the camp, including twenty who were serving a sentence of detention for petty crimes. Denny had allotted a store of pick-handles for defence in an emergency, but he realised that unless he could instil some spirit into the men they would be defeated at the first attack. He walked to a point roughly mid-way between the trenches and called out, "Now listen to me. We are going to be attacked and we are going to fight. We shall win. Everything is on our side—the wire fence, our guns—and you, when you hold the clubs that Corporal Lamissah is getting now. Even if the enemy break the wire we can beat them, for a club is as good as a gun in the close darkness." A line of bullets struck so near that he was hit on the leg by a dislodged stone, but he stood quite



still, urging them to calmness by his own example. He said, "You understand why we are being attacked. It is not you the Mau Mau want, but the road and, above all, this bridge, which we must guard with our lives. They know that when the road is finished they will be finished too. The Mau Mau will be driven from this part of the highlands and you, your wives and children will be safe."

He had no chance to tell the effect of his speech, for the enemy suddenly attacked from downhill, the one side he had considered safe. If to this extent they had achieved surprise, the advantage was more than offset by the difficulties they had set themselves. Not only were they attacking uphill—and the gradient was steep enough to absorb much of the fury of their assault—but they were advancing into the broad patch of light cast by the fire. Shooting haphazardly and screaming like devils, they surged at the wire. Some of them had cedar branches, which they threw across the fence before clambering over. There were not so many as Denny had imagined, twenty at the most and only half of those with shot-guns. The others, brandishing simis and pangas, came forward as their better-armed comrades fired as quickly as they could load.

"Will we hold them, do you think?" Palethorpe was crouching in a small weapon pit by the ration store. Denny could feel rather than see the signs of tension, his white face, the nervous grip on his shot-gun.

"If they can't do better than this . . ." Denny, who was still standing in the open, fired a burst from his tommy gun into the struggling crowd at the wire. Men screamed, danced grotesquely to death with their black bodies gleaming in the firelight; others came on until the police in the trenches shot them down.

"I can't believe," Denny said, "that this is all they've got." He was disappointed, not only that the attack had been so small, but that it had been so badly planned. Was this what an army had been mobilised to fight?

"Hadn't you better take cover, sir? There may be others."

"What? Oh, yes. I think you're right." He said, "I'll just have a word with Lamissah."

He had only advanced a few steps before he was aware of two things: one of the men who had been seemingly killed at the wire had come to life and was dragging himself painfully across the ground towards Denny's tent; there was a panga dragging in his hand. The other thing he saw was a line of shadows coming silently down the hill. He had no time to choose.

"Uphill," he shouted. "They're coming down the ravine."

Firing his tommy gun in short bursts he ran to the other weapon pit between the two trenches. But there was no chance to take cover. The Mau Mau, realising they had been discovered, came shrieking down the hill in a solid irresistible force. Guns were firing with short stabbing daggers of light; simis were hacking, pangas thrusting: in a moment there was pandemonium, in which it was impossible to tell friend from foe. The trenches were overrun and all the tents. Away to the left Palethorpe was still firing. Denny, who had used all the ammunition in his magazine, was wield his tommy gun as a club. Confusion was heightened as the workmen struggled out of the trenches to defend themselves with pick-handles. Perhaps Denny's harangue had had some effect, for although they seemed only intent on saving themselves they did not panic towards the wire.

Denny looked anxiously towards the bridge, whose steel latticed girders showed clearly above the dark shape of the lorry. So far as he could see, between the moments of urgent defence, there was no fighting near the lorry. A body lunged at him out of the darkness. Trying to avoid it he slipped and fell, and was instantly aware of a numbing pain above his left wrist. Blood was washing over his hand. His assailant had run on, perhaps leaving him for dead, and he had just enough time to pull the spare magazine from his belt, before he was attacked again. He met this new assailant with a single shot.

The battle was reaching its climax. Although there were

bodies everywhere beneath the frenzied feet, there seemed to be no diminution in the ardour or noise of the fight. The workmen, drawn without choice into a struggle for life, were fighting back strongly. Although Denny found it impossible in the darkness to distinguish the attackers from the attacked, his white skin and distinctive clothes made him a target for every terrorist within reach. There was no need for him to seek the enemy. They came to him.

It was after he had beaten off a determined sortie that he turned and saw a drift of shadows towards the lorry. A match was struck, revealing six or seven moran clambering up to the bridge. The man with a match seemed to be looking for the petrol tank.

Denny emptied the last of his magazine into the men on the lorry, and then, catching the gun by the stock and barrel, flailed his way to the attack. The butt crashed into a face; another man coming from behind the lorry was nearly decapitated by its force. Friend or foe: Denny was too angry to care. He clambered up on to the lorry, finding his grip on the arm of a man he had killed. There was no one up there alive. The bridge was safe.

In the cartridge case on his belt he found the third and last magazine of ammunition, but before he could insert it in the gun he felt a shattering, unbelievable pain in his right hand.

As the magazine dropped from his grasp he looked stupidly at the welling blood. Both hands now were bathed in his own blood. He was helpless beside the prize of steel and wood which was to have completed his redemption. The Mau Mau were coming back. The battle was moving down the hill.

Denny, watching in fury, shouted, "Palethorpe! Palethorpe!" but he knew that his voice would not carry above the din. Perhaps the boy was dead.

A Kikuyu terrorist was taking careful aim from a few yards. Denny ducked quickly and heard the bullet ricochet off the girder. Someone was climbing up the lorry.

Pressing his elbows on the bridge frame, Denny struggled to his feet. He kicked furiously at a head and fell backwards with the effort. He struggled up again. A rifle barrel was rising cautiously over the woodwork. Denny grasped it with his left hand, despite the agonising pain, and held on.

Over at the fence the battle was flaring up again. More rifles, a tommy gun. If this were a new attack. . . .

Then, incredibly, it was all over. The Mau Mau—those that were left—were streaming up the hill; the few unwounded workmen were brandishing their clubs in triumph.

Sinking to his knees inside the lorry, with his wounded hands dripping blood over the bridge, Denny watched the Police Reserve patrol coming cautiously across the clearing with rifles at the port. At the head of the echelon was their commander, Barbara's father.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE MOON HAD RISEN AT LAST, and by its pale light Denny tried to restore some order into the camp. Palethorpe had begged to go with the patrol in pursuit of the Mau Mau and, an hour before, Denny had watched him climbing with Ian Stanhope and the Police Reserve into the ravine. No one was left in the camp except Denny, the Dutchman de Groot, who knew something about first aid, a crowd of subdued workmen and five prisoners, squatting round the field of dead and injured.

Fifteen of the workmen had been killed and twenty were seriously injured. The raiders had lost twelve dead, fifteen wounded, and there were five prisoners. Despite the pain of his wounded hand and wrist, which de Groot had roughly bandaged, Denny worked with energy. He felt strangely triumphant. Now the road would be finished. Within a few days they would reach the top of the escarpment, and the red line of freedom would stand a monument to his success. He hoped that Barbara would be pleased.

With Corporal Lamissah at his side he went across to the prisoners, who were huddled together like captured beasts. They did not look up as he approached.

"Everything all right?"

The two tribal policemen in charge stood to attention. "All safe, bwana."

"These men are valuable," he said. "Guard them with your lives."

"Yes, bwana."

He was about to walk away when something caught his attention: a patch of bare scalp, a line across the outcroppings of black hair. "Haven't I seen you before?"

The man did not reply or look up.

"You—haven't I seen you before?"

As the man still did not move, the corporal bent down and dragged at his hair. An ugly squat-featured face was

revealed, dark with hate and fear. Denny said, "I thought so. Only I can't remember. . . ." Unlike most white men he could distinguish one black face from another and remember those he had seen. But this. . . . There was a chord somewhere in his memory.

It was Corporal Lamissah who reminded him. "One of the drivers, bwana."

"From Mohammed's store?"

"Yes, bwana."

"And this one." He forced them to raise their faces. "I've seen this man before." Three of the five were Kikuyu, employed by Mohammed.

Remembering the fat, apparently sincere, face, the protestations of friendship—"Whoever you doubt, Mr. Denny, you must trust me"—Denny felt the dull, hurt anger of one who had been betrayed. And yet—he had to admit it—Mohammed might be entirely innocent. No one could say without doubt that any particular native was trustworthy. Except Ali.

He walked slowly back to all that remained of his tent. Inside, the dying Ali greeted him with a smile. Because Denny had kept his boy for so many years he had come to look on him almost as a white man, or perhaps it was that Ali, watching his master's indifference to the European code, had come half-way to meet him in a sort of half-native world of their own. But now, as he lay on the camp-bed with a gunshot in the shoulder and a simi slash across the cheek, Ali was pure native. He was going to die. His time had come and there was nothing even a qualified doctor could have done to save him. Why struggle or feel sorry for the inevitable? Denny sat beside him without talking.

Out in the compound the small, hard-bitten Dutchman was going round the wounded. He had no sentiment and very little sympathy, so that every now and again the night would be split by the agonised shriek of an unfortunate patient.

"It'll soon be dawn, Ali. We'll get you down to Manake. The hospital there—they'll soon fix you up."

Ali smiled again and turned his face on the pillow. "I not see the dawn, bwana."

"Nonsense! Of course you will. I'll take you down myself."

Ali said solicitously, "Your hands, bwana. They not clean. You take plenty iodine, clean bandage. . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know. But don't worry about me. Think about yourself, about getting well again."

"I not get well again, bwana. You know that. Another hour, two hour, maybe, I die."

Denny said angrily, "You will if you talk like that—as though you've made up your mind!" He smiled and laid his bandaged hand on Ali's wrist. "Sleep now. I'll stay here until it's time to go."

His hands were hurting abominably. However he held them, palm upwards on his knees, loosely by his side, or resting against the bed, they were burning centres of unforgettable pain. He wondered what time it was. The watch in his breast pocket could not be reached without using his hands. He tried to calculate—dusk, the panic of his workmen towards the fence, the battle which seemed to go on for an hour, but was probably over in less than half that time, the arrival of the patrol: it couldn't be much after midnight. Five hours to go before dawn. He stood up and walked to the door of the tent. Ali was lying with eyes closed, apparently peaceful.

By the light of the fire de Groot was tending the wounded: the kneeling, unrelenting figure of the white man, the knife and roll of bandage, two workmen who had been detailed as assistants, watching with ghoulish interest, the prostrate form of black fear.

De Groot stood up and wiped his sleeve across his forehead. Denny asked, "How's it going?"

"About all I can do," the Dutchman said. "Not much use, man, wasting good bandage on some of them."

"Because they'll die?"

"Yes. And they know it—better than I do. Once they've

made up their minds, there's nothing you can do."

Denny said, "That's what I feel about Ali. He's made up his mind. I suppose—if we could get him down to the hospital . . . ?" but de Groot shook his head. "He's made up his mind, man. He'll die."

The rows of wounded men brought a touch of neatness to the camp, as though the nursery of a destructive child had been carefully set in order for the night. Apart from an occasional moan, there was no sound or movement from the wounded. Like most natives they could panic at the thought of pain, but once it had been inflicted, particularly if it came from an honourable wound, they would bear it with amazing fortitude. The five prisoners were still huddled together between their guards.

"How about a wash," Denny asked, "if you've finished, and a drink?"

"Man, I could do with a drink."

They stood outside the tent with the whisky bottle between them. The steep wooded slopes of the escarpment were flooding with moonlight, but there were deep shadows up the ravine. Nearer, they could see the wire fence, breached at a dozen points, the lorry with the bridge, and the grotesque shapes of broken tents.

"What time is it?"

The Dutchman turned his watch to the light. "Just past one."

"Another four hours."

"How are your hands?"

"Not so good. But I guess I'll survive until morning."

Something was sniffing round the dead bodies—one of the native dogs or a hyena. There was a sound of distant shooting. De Groot swilled down his whisky. "They'll never catch them."

"No—still, it's worth the try."

De Groot admitted grudgingly, "It's been a good night's work. This'll drive them up into the jungle. A good thing, man, you managed to hold on."



"A good thing you came when you did."

The Dutchman filled his glass from the whisky bottle. He offered some to Denny, who shook his head. "No, thanks. It's too bloody painful trying to hold the glass."

De Groot said, "It's nothing but a miracle we came this way tonight."

"That's what I thought. You weren't due up here until tomorrow."

"The day after." The Dutchman gave a short, hard-bitten laugh. "Man, you should have heard the trouble when we suggested to old Stanhope we should alter the route."

"What happened?"

"Young Ian, it was. Said he was brownd-off with chasing shadows. The only real success any of us had had was when he sent the 'Kuke' Guard up here on a wrong date."

"He's right, dammit! And now this." He thought for a minute. "It almost looks . . ."

"As though you weren't so far wrong."

Denny said, "I'm sure of it. The more you think . . . How can you explain these two successes against all those other failures unless somewhere there's a leak?"

"It begins to look that way."

Down in the valley a dog barked. The moonlight lay like a silver mist on the mountain-side. Below the camp the darker line of the road curved to the slope until it merged into the translucent distance. There was a cold breeze blowing up from the Rift, and the sky was brilliant with stars. Denny asked, "Could Mohammed have known about the patrols?"

"You mean, where they were going?"

"And when."

De Groot looked doubtfully at his glass. Then he shook his head. "No. It isn't possible," he said. "Why do you ask?"

"Only because three of those men, the men you took alive, are Mohammed's men. They've been to this camp—oh, a dozen times."

"The hell they have!" De Groot said impatiently, "My

God, man, I'd like to have them alone for half an hour." He made a cutting motion as though wielding a whip. "I'd soon find out what they know."

Denny said, "You can't do that."

"Too true, I can't. Not with all those johnnies from England about—news hounds, authors, Members of—Parliament. They'd scream bloody torture until someone could put me in jail."

"Well," said Denny, "maybe there's something to be said for their way of thinking, after all."

"But, man, they don't know anything. They come out here as visitors. . . ."

"I know. Only, as it happens, what they say is true. You can't gain anything by torture."

"My God, I'd like to try."

Denny said good-naturedly, "Well, don't try it in my camp."

De Groot screwed up his eyes and looked at him across the whisky glass. "I'd forgotten, man—your reputation."

"Look." Denny made a conciliatory gesture with his bandage. "Don't let's get worked up about this. We're both tired—you especially. You pretend to be so tough, yet you've worked like a hero to patch up these wounded—half of them Mau Mau."

"That's different."

"It's not different at all. Anyway, why don't you lie down, get some sleep? The others may be some time yet. I'll stay up."

"With Ali?"

"Yes."

The Dutchman grinned, but made no comment beyond, "All right."

"I'll get Palethorpe's bed out."

"The ground's good enough for me, man."

In the tent Ali was patiently dying. The rise and fall of his chest to each laboured breath, the flicker of unseeing eyes, indicated that life was rapidly slipping away.

Charged with a deeper emotion than he would have cared to admit, Denny sat on the canvas chair by the bed. The brown tent walls, a spider crawling along the brailing, the box of ammunition by the pole: he looked with studied interest at each in turn, refusing to hear the expiration, the long pause before another weary inspiration. A hand lay like soft black velvet on the bed frame. White teeth glittered in a smile of death.

He could not have said how long he sat there, waiting, by the only man he could trust completely. The tent walls changed from dark brown to puce and then to grey as the dawn filtered through the canvas. The patrol was coming back down the ravine: their chatter and Palethorpe's laugh sounded clearly over the still camp. Someone was breaking more sticks for the fire.

Then, uncannily, Ali rose from his bed. He sat up, alert and wide-eyed. "Bwana."

"Ali! You're better!"

"Bwana, take care of hands. Plenty iodine—fresh bandages."

"Of course, only . . ."

Without another word or sound of pain, Ali lay carefully back on his pillow and died.

Denny went outside into the cool dawn air. Daylight was flooding over the mountain-top and the mists were rising in the valley. A file of men was coming down the ravine: Stanhope, Ian, Palethorpe, and others who had completed the victory. They were tired now; only the two young men had energy for talk. There were no prisoners.

Prisoners! Denny looked quickly across the camp. He stepped over de Groot's sleeping body and ran across the clearing. He trod over the prostrate men by the fire. He looked behind the lorry and the ration tents.

"What's happened, sir?" Palethorpe called cheerfully. "Have you lost someone?"

Lost someone! The two tribal policemen had vanished with the five prisoners. And Ali was dead in his bed.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### 1

AGAINST HIS WILL he spent four days in the hospital at Manake, and, unexpectedly, he had four visitors. On the first day, while he was still drowsy from the anæsthetic, the ward sister stood disapprovingly at the foot of his bed, and announced, "A person outside wants to see you. Says his name is Mohammed."

Mohammed! Denny cast wearily through his mind for an anchorage. Thoughts, memories, facts, illusions were tossing in a phantasmagoria, so that although he knew he had been angry with Mohammed, he couldn't remember why. His puzzled gaze rested on the sister, starched cap, folded hands, lips pursed: no help there. "All right," he said, "I'd better see him."

He closed his eyes for a moment and, almost at once, a voice, charged with concern, loomed into his hearing. "Mr. Denny, sir. What terrible thing is this?"

Denny looked up tiredly and saw the heavy-jowled Judas face above him. There was no escape. He said, "Hullo, Mohammed."

"Mr. Denny, I have just heard—only a few minutes ago. I came straight here."

"Why did you come, Mohammed?"

"Why? Well, because I am your friend."

"I remember. You told me that before, only——"

"And it is true, Mr. Denny. I ask you to believe me. Oh, you may laugh to yourself and think, 'What! Fat old Mohammed, the Syrian trader, my friend!', but still it is true. I pray that one day you may realise, that one day, perhaps, you will need a friend."

"For heaven's sake, Mohammed, don't sound so humble.

It doesn't suit you, even if it were true; and yet," he was hypnotised by the eyes with their hurt appeal, "I'm not so sure that in your own queer way you don't wish me well."

"Oh, I do, Mr. Denny. Believe me. When I heard about this dreadful attack, all the wounded men and the killed, I asked, 'What happened to Mr. Denny? Never mind about the others. What happened to Mr. Denny?'"

Thoughts fitted into perspective. He remembered now—the camp clearing at dawn, the neat lines of dead and wounded, embers of the dying fire, the patrol coming down the ravine—and no prisoners. He said, "I shouldn't warn you of this, Mohammed, but because I want to find the truth, I will. Sometime today you will be questioned by the police."

"Yes?"

"There were five prisoners last night, five unwounded prisoners."

"Yes?"

"Three of them were your men."

Mohammed showed no anxiety. With the merest gesture of a shrug, he said, "But that is regrettable, although it only proves what we all know—that no Kikuyu is to be trusted entirely."

"How did you know they were 'Kukes'?"

"Well, it's a reasonable guess."

"You employ men from other tribes."

"Oh, yes. I have a large pay-roll, Mr. Denny—you understand? Unless I'm mistaken there are men of the Nandi, Kipsigi, Suk—but most of them are local 'Kukes'. Obviously in a Mau Mau raid it is reasonable to assume that your attackers were 'Kukes'."

"I suppose so." Denny found his thoughts wandering again, and he turned on his pillow, looking into the infinite blue of the sky. A vulture flapping past was probably making for the hillside and the scene of last night's battle. "I suppose you'll say that you had no idea these men had taken the Mau Mau oath?"

"That is what I shall say, Mr. Denny, and, of course, it will be the truth. Other men, for all I know, may be as dangerous, but I try to think not. After all, if you yield to every suspicion you finish up by trusting no one, by losing the ability to trust."

"Sometimes," Denny said, "I think that's happened to me."

Mohammed patted the bed with his fat beringed hand. "I ask you not to worry about this, Mr. Denny. These men will be dealt with."

"I'm afraid that's impossible. They've escaped."

"Oh, I know, but there are other ways. . . ."

"How did you know?"

"Know?"

"How did you know these prisoners had escaped?"

Mohammed's eyes withdrew into the folds of flesh. He hovered in silence for a moment before emerging again in genial frankness. "I will tell you the truth, Mr. Denny—not because I must but because your continued doubts fill me with embarrassment. Surely you can trust your friend."

"Let's have this truth, Mohammed."

"It's very simple really. You said the police would come to question me. In fact, they have been already."

"About last night."

"Oh yes. Captain Egglestone came to my store. He asked all the questions you have asked. I had no difficulty in convincing him."

"That you knew nothing about these men?"

"Exactly."

Denny turned wearily on his pillow. "I don't know, Mohammed. Perhaps, you're right. Perhaps I have lost the ability to trust."

Lucien came and stayed only a few minutes. In a way, Denny felt, he was even less trustworthy than Mohammed.

No one would have been taken in by his shallow concern.

"Had to be sure you were all right, sir."

"I'm all right," Denny said. "I'll be out in a few days—tomorrow if I can't get past that starched dragon at the door."

"I've heard. . . . There have been such wild stories about what happened."

"What sort of stories?"

"Well——"

"At least," Denny said, "we know for sure now that Tom Palethorpe will make the grade."

"That *is* good news."

Why, Denny wondered, did it seem that Lucien really meant the opposite of what he said? 'That is *bad* news.' The expression, the cold smile, should have gone with those words. Denny asked, "What sort of stories have you heard?"

Lucien's deprecating gesture could not conceal the malicious triumph. "Well, there was something about prisoners."

"Five unwounded prisoners escaped."

"Yes, that's what I heard. And then again there's some talk of a leakage—someone has been careless—I've heard it suggested that there's a renegade—someone is in league with the blacks—but that, I think, is going a bit too far."

"Why are you telling me all this?" Denny asked.

"Well—because—I thought you should know. There are strong rumours going round town—oh, I know, it's too bloody silly for words—but—well—people are saying that you are responsible."

By the time the Provincial Commissioner came, Denny had recovered from his anger. Now he was inclined to laugh at the whole absurd affair. The sultry anger of after-

noon had cooled with the evening breeze, so that he could smile without reservation as the P.C. came into the ward. "Hallo, sir. It's good of you to take the trouble."

The P.C. lowered himself on to a chair like an elephant performing a rather incredible trick. He pulled himself nearer to the bed and looked with genuine concern at the bandaged hands. "I'm damn sorry about this, Denny. I'm only glad it wasn't any worse." He asked, "Will the hands be all right?"

"To use?" Denny raised them carefully from the bed. "The left one's all right—just a cut above the wrist."

"And the right?"

"I don't know yet. The doc. says he can't tell."

"I'm sorry." The P.C. shifted in embarrassment. "In a way I feel responsible. I mean, you wouldn't have had the job if I hadn't asked for you."

Denny said quietly, "It was the best thing that ever happened to me. I mean, the road—it's meant a lot. I'll always be grateful." Sentiment had never come easily to him, but he knew that with the P.C. it was not necessary to say more. Each in his own way was a man of good will, and they could understand each other in a few words.

The P.C. said, "You'll be glad to know the bridge is up. Young Palethorpe has taken charge. I think he's about as keen as you."

"I'm glad," Denny said. "He gave a good account of himself the other night. The road has meant a lot to him too."

Through the window they could see beyond the corner of the hospital wall to the open face of the escarpment with the red ribbon of the road winding through the sun-drenched foothills into the dark shadows of Kilavo Ravine, to emerge again as a scarcely distinguishable smudge on the shoulder of the plateau.

"You'll be finished now in a few days," the P.C. said, and then, awkwardly, "Whatever happens you'll always have this to your credit."



Because the stab of Lucien's remark was still an open wound, Denny's mind leapt to the meaning. He asked, "Is anything likely to happen? Because of the other night?"

The P.C. scraped his chair on the polished floor. "I don't know. As I see it, you did a damn fine job. I mean, defending the bridge, holding out until Stanhope's men came. It isn't as though you came through without a wound. If anyone saved the road it was you."

Denny said bitterly, "But there were five prisoners who escaped."

"After all," the P.C. said, "we've still got fifteen prisoners, unless some of them have died. Why there's all this fuss about five men . . ."

"Is there much of a fuss?" Denny was almost too angry to speak. He saw that he had assumed too easily that he would be accepted back into the white community, but they had long memories and long tongues. They intended to keep him as an outcast.

The P.C. said unhappily, "Well, you know how it is. For a good many years you've upset the farmers. Now instead of making you a hero they see a chance of paying back old scores."

"To hell with them!" Denny said. "I'm sorry the men escaped—naturally. But if they can't find something worse than that to say against me. . . ."

The P.C. did not reply. He was looking down at the bed, and at last it was Denny who voiced the absurd accusation. "Surely they're not seriously thinking I'm a renegade?"

The P.C. raised his eyes. "That's what they are saying. That either through carelessness or by design you let the 'Kukes' have details of our patrols."

"But damm it all," said Denny. "It was I who wanted the patrols altered. It was I who had to fight the bastards and got one of my hands half shot off for my pains."

"I know," the P.C. said. "You don't have to tell me this. But you know—you've been out here twenty years. They

get a bee in the bonnet, something to be indignant about, and they'll shout and scream bloody murder whatever the facts of the case."

## 4

On the fifth morning he could bear the inaction no longer. He could tell, even from his bed by the open hospital window, that the rains were coming. There was no wind; even the breeze had died away, and the heat lay with a furnace glare along the valley. There were small clouds in a merciless sky, and the outline of tree and rock and mountain edge were cut in sharp definition against the parched earth. From his bed he could see the Stanhope farm and the track beneath the hill where he had lain with Barbara.

He was out of bed and had struggled somehow into his clothes when the ward sister came in with the doctor.

"Mr. Denny!" Her thin nose, beaded with perspiration, sniffed disapproval.

"I'm sorry," Denny said. "I must go. There's a job to be done."

"Will you please get straight back into bed," she said, "this minute."

"No. I'm sorry, Sister. I'll come back this evening if you want to dress my hand."

"Mr. Denny!"

"I'm going out," Denny flared, "whether you like it or not."

The doctor was a young man, straight out from England, and he had heard a lot about Denny. To him the D.C. was a figure of interest, almost of romance. He said, "Before you go, let's have a look at that hand." While Denny watched suspiciously, he took off the bandaging and probed hurtfully round the ragged scar. He said, "I'll bandage it again. You'll have to go carefully. If you knock it you're likely to be back here for four weeks instead of four days."

"I'll watch it," Denny said. "And thanks."

"Come in every morning to have it dressed."

Outside in the road the oppressive heat was almost too much to be borne. Even a few steps from shadow to shadow required an effort of will. Denny stood in the protection of the hospital wall while his senses became adjusted to the glare. A dog trotted slowly along the gutter with ears and tail at half-mast. On a roof across the road a vulture preened its dusty feathers. Up the slight incline from the centre of the town a car was coming, its rounded bonnet glittering in the sun.

"Barbara!"

"Darling!" She was out of the car and clasping him in her arms before the wake of dust had settled. "To think after all these days I was nearly too late."

"What's happened? I've been hoping you would come."

"I know. Oh, darling, if you only knew how I'd tried."

He said, "Let's go somewhere. We can't talk here."

A mile out of town in a pleasant cedar grove a German couple had started a small hotel. It had been a favourite spot in the hot weather for the dwellers in dusty Manake, but the present emergency had frightened away most of the old customers, so that when Barbara and Denny drove in there were no guests and no servants, apart from the German wife. They sat outside at one of the tables on the brown grass. An old grizzled dog y panting beneath a bush, and the *hausfrau* who brought their drinks had rivulets of perspiration in the folds of her neck.

When they were alone Barbara took his wounded hand carefully between her own. She rested her cheek on the bandage. "Oh, darling, when I heard about that dreadful fight and how you were wounded I was so desperately worried—I wanted to rush straight in to see you."

He smiled. "What happened? Did the car break down?"

"Oh, no." She said in small voice, "Mother wouldn't let me."

"Wouldn't let you!" He said in exasperation, "In any case, she's not your mother."

"No, but . . ." She began to cry. "Oh, darling, you must be patient a bit longer. I know you want me to stand up for myself, only I can't openly defy her."

"Why not?"

"You know why not. I told you before."

"Because she might take it out on your father?"

She said, "I'll think of an answer soon. There must be some way."

"I hope I'll still be here," Denny said, "when you think of it."

As she turned her stricken face towards him he was ashamed. She asked breathlessly, "You're not thinking of going?"

He shifted uneasily. "Oh, I don't know. It seems I'm being blamed for the prisoners who escaped. More than that, they seem to think I'm a renegade."

She bent her head so that her falling hair hid her face, but he could feel the warm tears on his wrist. He said, 'Don't cry. It's nothing really. I've had worse things than this said against me. As long as *you* know it's not true. . . .' As she still continued to cry, he raised her chin with his good hand. "Come on now. What's so upsetting about this? It seems that I should be the one to be worried."

Her pitiful sobbing took him back to the morning when he had first seen her, when she had hovered on the brink of suicide. In between her tears she said, "Oh, darling, I see you don't know."

"Know what?"

"How all these dreadful stories were started."

Understanding came to him as a cold shock. Of course. He said, "You mean—your mother—Mrs. Stanhope?"

She said, "I tried to warn you, darling. She's determined to prevent us marrying. She'll stop at nothing."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE WISPY CLOUDS had disappeared by noon, so he knew that there would be another clear day before the rain. The atmosphere, which was hot and airless in the valley, was not appreciably cooler as he climbed the hill. The grass was brown and parched and powdered red with dust from the road. A herd of zebra ran down the hill with frisking manes; the buffalo moved purposefully across the sky-line in search of water. The boy who was driving grated from one gear to another as the hill steepened, and the ghost of Ali came like a memory of old times.

The camp clearing was much as it had always been. The fence had been mended, a new ration tent had been found; the fire smouldered under a dozen pots. Along the edge of the forest a score of mounds were the only reminder of that wild night.

"Leave the car here. I'll walk."

As he followed the road through the line of trees, along by the river bed, up the levelled gorge, he could not restrain a surge of pride. The P.C. had been right. Whatever they said about him, whatever they did, no one could deny him this achievement. Workmen on the lower slopes greeted him with white grins. "Jambo, bwana. Jambo."

He came to the bridge. It had been set, not at right-angles with the river as he would have liked, but rather slanting to conform with the slope of the hill. But it had been firmly emplaced. The bulwarks of rock and concrete at both ends would not be easily dislodged.

Beyond the bridge the gradient eased to the scrub-covered shoulder of the escarpment, and the road had been pushed over a false crest so that it was some minutes before he saw the bulldozer, the toiling workmen and Palethorpe.

The boy came to meet him with unaffected gladness. "Hallo, sir. I can't tell you how glad I am to see you."

"It's good to be back," Denny said.

"You know, sir, I was thinking last night. We'll be finished tomorrow—at least, we'll have cleared the escarpment. It wouldn't have been right to have done the last leg without you."

"You've done a good job," Denny said, "while I've been away. The rains will be here—tomorrow, I reckon. We'll just have it finished in time."

"And I'll win my bet."

Denny said, "I'm glad of that. Incidentally, who was it betted against us? Was it Lucien?"

"Well . . ."

"It doesn't matter." Let them talk, he thought. Let the dogs of *apartheid* yap at his heels. The road would be finished. Whether the Europeans accepted him again into their community seemed hardly to matter. He had the P.C.'s confidence, Palethorpe's, he would marry Barbara. His conscience was clear. Across the Rift a bank of cumulus was forming: the sun was blotted from Flamingo Lake.

"It looks as though you were right, sir. There's rain on the way. I hope to God it keeps off until tomorrow."

"It will," said Denny, "but you'd better keep those men at it until dark."

His forecast was correct in that the rain held off all that day, but towards evening the clouds were collecting on the hills, like an army in serried ranks preparing for an approaching battle. The wind rose, not in the customary breeze, scarcely strong enough to move the leaves, nor in a steady current sweeping down from the highlands, but in short fitful gusts which dragged up the dust and left it hanging in the following still air. There was a feeling of tension, of anticipation, as though the whole countryside, the dogs and skinny cattle, the hornbills and wheeling vultures, the trees and grass and withering flowers, were aware that relief was coming. As darkness fell there was a roll of thunder from the north, and lightning played over the distant hills.

Next morning broke dry and hot. The promised storm

had passed away to the west, but the clouds were gathering again above the Mau. For Denny, driving up his own road to the ravine, there was an added reason for tension. Today the road would be finished (it might be finished already), and he would see how it would stand up to its most severe test, the flooding torrent of rain. Although he felt that he had done everything humanly possible to make it usable even in the worst weather, he couldn't be sure until he saw the river in full spate. And if there were some point where the water overflowed nothing could be done about it for some weeks, when the rain stopped. The retaining wall by the rock buttress, the narrow gorge, the bridge: these were the doubts which occupied his mind.

He had hardly arrived in the camp before the storm began its first onslaught. It came so quickly that it caught him unprepared. As he climbed out of the car the first big, widely-spaced drops of rain began to fall, and before he had walked half-way to the wire there was a steady downpour. He started to walk back to the car, but the curtain of rain increased so rapidly that he was wet through to the skin before he could find shelter. His driver grinned as he pushed open the door. "Plenty rain, bwana. Good."

He sat inside with the water streaming from his clothes on to the seat and globules of red mud splashing upwards through the window. In a few minutes the whole scene had changed. The curving slope of brown grass was running with water, the wheel marks of lorries filled into miniature canals, crossing and re-crossing the camp. The native pye dogs, usually the most dispirited of creatures, were running round and round, barking in sheer excitement. Some workmen who had been given chores inside the camp had stripped off their clothes and were dancing, laughing, their black bodies gleaming with moisture. Even the trees seemed to yield gladly to the onslaught until after a few minutes the downpour became so intense that they were lost to view.

Denny sat quietly, watching and waiting for the storm to pass. He knew that the rain might go on for weeks, but

before long this first fury would be over and he would be able to look at the road. Beside him his native driver sat clicking his tongue with pleasure. New life was here, new hope, and the fertile soil could begin another cycle.

About noon, after it had been raining solidly for three hours, the storm passed. The sun came out, and in a few minutes the tents and trees and lorries were steaming as though on fire. Denny stepped carefully out of the car and splashed his way across the camp. The hillside was running with water. Ground that had been concrete-hard only a few hours before was now soft mud. He slipped and splashed up the hill to the ravine. The gutters beside the road were miniature blood-red torrents, but the road surface, although muddy on top, was firm enough on the hard core beneath.

As he entered the ravine, the river, which was now roaring down the once-dry donga, was a hundred yards to his left, but their courses converged until as he reached the high cliff of rock they were only separated by the concrete retaining wall. But separated they were. Against the wall, the waters churned in fury, but there was a two-foot margin of safety at the top.

Farther up, the passage through the narrow cleft was not so successful. The river bed had been made deeper, but not deep enough, for the river was brimming over the road and would come over more rapidly when the rains started again in earnest.

The bridge, surprisingly, presented no problem at all. The ascent was more gradual here and the river bed wider. There was a clearance of several feet beneath the bridge.

He met Palethorpe at the top of the road where it cleared the last crest on to the summit of the escarpment. The boy had obviously not troubled to take shelter. He was wet and mud-stained and happy.

"We've done it, sir! We've done it!" He came running down the grass, slipped, and sat heavily in the mud. They



looked at each other in triumph and laughed. "Yes," said Denny. "We've done it."

They walked down the hill together. Denny with a deep contentment scarcely heard Palethorpe's laughter and excited chatter. The steep wooded slopes were covered with a rising mist as the sun beat down. The ravine which had been so silent was now alive with the splash and gurgle of innumerable streams running down to join the torrent.

They stopped at the narrow gorge. "You'll have to do something about this," Denny said. "A retaining wall as broad and high as you can make it before the next storm comes.

"I'll get them on that at once, sir. Luckily, there's all the rocks we shifted out of here. We'll get that finished before evening."

"Apart from that," Denny said with a smile, "we've done a bloody fine job."

As he came out of the trees alone, he saw with pleasure that the P.C.'s staff car was in the camp. There was no one, apart from Barbara, with whom he would sooner have shared this triumph.

The P.C. got out of his car when he saw him coming and splashed across to the wire. "Hallo, Denny. I thought I'd find you here."

"I wouldn't have missed this for anything," Denny said. "The first test."

"How does it look?"

"All right. There's just one point—Palethorpe's seeing to that now. But you can tell all those doubting Thomases that there's a good all-weather road to the top of the escarpment."

"I'm glad," the P.C. said. "I'm damn glad."

"Would you care to see it, sir?"

"No, . . ." The P.C. hesitated. "I won't come now. As a matter of fact . . . something I had to see you about." He said unhappily, "Let's go in my car."

Following across the compound Denny was vaguely

puzzled, but he was still too full of the road to feel any anxiety.

"It's about that business up here," the P.C. said, "about those prisoners."

"Yes?"

"I told you there's been a lot of talk."

"Talk! They've too much time for talk, some of these farmers."

"Yes, well it wouldn't have been so bad if you hadn't made one particular enemy, though why she should dislike you enough to go to this extent! The woman must be mad."

"To what extent?" Denny asked. "What has she done now?"

The P.C. looked desperately unhappy. "I'm damn sorry about this, Denny. I know how much you did that evening. I know what you've achieved."

"What has she done?"

"She's gone over my head, reported the matter to Nairobi."

"Backed by some of her big-hearted friends!"

"Yes. There's a letter, so I understand, signed by half a dozen of the farmers, though she's the one behind it all."

Denny asked quietly, "What do they hope to achieve?"

It was like the shock of a wound, the mind was too numb to feel the real pain.

"What she wanted, what she has done, is to get a board of inquiry."

"So I'm to be tried?"

"Not tried. Someone's coming down, someone from the Secretariat, I dare say. He'll hear the facts. Whatever they say, he'll have to hear my version too. There's really not much to worry about."

As Denny climbed out of the car, he knocked his wounded hand and the sudden pain brought on the first flood of bitterness. He asked, "How long must I wait for all this?"

The P.C. said, "I don't know. I'll get it done as soon as

possible, but it may be a little time—a fortnight or three weeks.”

“Ah, well.” He turned towards his own car.

“And, Denny——” The P.C. scrambled out of the staff car and came across to put his hand on Denny’s shoulder. “I’m sorry to tell you this—sorry that I should be the one to tell you this.” A flush of anger or embarrassment spread up his face. “In the meantime—Nairobi have sent instructions. . . . You’re to be suspended. Lucien will take over as acting D.C.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE LONG DAYS PASSED and the nights. Suspended in a vacuum of bitterness, between the new life he had chosen and the old carefree native existence, he had nothing to do but drink. Unwilling to spend the waiting period at Kanye under Lucien's guarded malice, he had come to Manake intending to lodge at one of the so-called hotels—half-drinking den, half-brothel—in the native quarter, but the P.C. in some quiet way of his own managed to intercept his car in the high street and invited Denny to stay with him at the Commissioner's residence. Although Denny would not take advantage of this warm-hearted gesture (he knew that he must be an embarrassment to any Government official) it succeeded in putting him on a more even keel. At least someone, a white man, had acted generously.

He had compromised by taking a room at the Marlborough, the least popular of the European hotels, and, without the incentive of acceptance by the white community, he had drifted inevitably back to whisky. For a week or more his only view of Manake was through the long windows of the bar. On purpose he chose a table where he couldn't see across the town to Flamingo Lake and the road riding up the mountain. It rained heavily for five days, and then, after a morning of sunshine which set the woodwork steaming, the storm came back with even greater ferocity. Huddled over the table, Denny refused to think about the road. Palethorpe hadn't been to see him, but he guessed that this was Lucien's doing. He could imagine the boy being ordered, with a phoney smile, to make some long and pointless trip in one of the lorries. The P.C. looked in occasionally, but only to report that he had no definite news about the court of inquiry. And while the rains beat out their malice on the window and on the tin roof of the hotel, Denny waited and drank.

He did not see, or expect to see, Barbara Stanhope. Although she had warned him that the old lady meant to cause trouble he still could not subdue a resentment against the girl. It wasn't so much what she had done as her connection, however unwilling, with the Stanhope family. In that black and white farmstead on the hill were centred all the prejudice, the intolerance, which were the cause not only of his present trouble but, at least in part, of all the troubles in Kenya.

There were few visitors to the hotel, and those that came kept well clear of him at the bar. He was an outcast who had deserted the blacks and whom the whites would not accept.

On the sixth afternoon, after he had been dozing on his bed, he came carefully down the dark staircase to find two strangers at the bar. They didn't see him enter, and he sat deliberately out of their view behind a corner of the bar. They were young men, farmers' sons or junior Government officers, and their shallow talk and laughter rubbed on his nerves until he had to hold tightly to the arms of his chair. Fernandes, the Goanese barman, was not in the room, and Denny had to sit tautly with the whisky thirst on his tongue, the monotonous drumming of the rain, and the silly adolescent talk from beyond the bar. Control slipped and was caught again; his eyes twitched and his heart began to thump with repression. Then incredibly he heard his own name.

"D.C. Denny—what a lad!—laid half the black girls in Mangayo by all accounts."

Denny closed his eyes, feeling a cold sickness rather than anger. Would the hounds of privilege never leave his trail?

"Well, whatever he's done he'll pay for it now," the other voice said.

"The court of inquiry. Do you really think they'll nail him? They say the P.C.'s on his side."

"Oh, anyone could fool the old man. These Government

wallahs won't be so easy. Anyway I wasn't talking about the inquiry."

"Why, is there something else?"

"Of course, didn't you know? He's fallen for the fatal charms of Calamity Jane."

Denny lurched to his feet, nearly upsetting the table. He came round into their startled vision with murder in his eyes. Through the blur of anger he saw their round, frightened eyes: one of them was rising to his feet.

"You bastard!" Denny said. He drew back his fist and then, feeling the pain beneath the bandages dropped it loosely to his sides. He leant over with his good hand on the table. Their scared faces were so close that he could see the down on their lips. "Get out!" The order came with a spurt of vicious anger. "Get out!"

They backed away and left without finishing their drinks.

Denny sat down heavily, resting his trembling hand on the table, while the distortion of fury passed. They were only boys, he told himself, but he knew that they had only repeated what their fathers were saying. What everyone was saying in all the clubs of Manake. He called sharply, "Fernandes," and then, receiving no reply, leapt up with all control gone. He kicked at the counter. "Fernandes!"

By evening he was morosely drunk and when he came down next morning he started again where he had left off. Behind the whisky haze he could forget the injustice, the meanness, the cruelty. He could convince himself that nothing mattered, neither the coming court of inquiry, the accusations that had been made, not even Barbara. And yet——

She came tremulously into the bar-room with the fearful air of one called to identify a body. Her eyes widened beseechingly as she saw him and she called, "Darling!"

Denny looked up without relaxing his hold on the whisky glass. "So you *have* come!"

"Oh, darling, I've wanted to see you so much only . . ."

"She wouldn't let you!"

"No, no. For once. . . . When I heard what she had done I came down without asking. I was here yesterday and the day before. I couldn't find you. I didn't know where to look."

"You couldn't have tried very hard."

"Oh, I did. I went to places I've never dared to enter before—the London\*, the Kenya Palace; I even went to Mohammed's store."

He was not too drunk or too angry to appreciate what such a search must have cost: defiance of the old lady, humility before the sneers of those who despised her—'Calamity Jane's lost her man already!', and he observed in a softer voice, "Obviously you didn't ask the right people."

"Well, darling, I tried. I told you—Mohammed. I even phoned Mr. Lucien."

"D.C. Lucien," he corrected. "Your new D.C."

"No." She came over to him confidently and sat facing him across the table. "He's not D.C., and he never will be at your expense."

"Don't be too sure. If the high-ups in Nairobi have believed your mother's story enough to set up a court of inquiry they're not going to be easily persuaded by anything I can say."

"Not if you go to them like this." She was sitting straight-backed and unyielding in a manner she might have copied unconsciously from the old lady. "Nobody's going to be impressed with you like this."

His expression slipped into anger. "What do you mean? If you think, after all that's happened, I'm going to sit here and listen to you preach!"

"Of course you'll lose," she said, "unless you make up your mind to win."

He made an irritable gesture with the glass. "Oh, what's the use! They've made up their minds to break me whether I'm guilty or not. You know that!"

"And you're going like a sulky schoolboy refusing to fight."

He flared out, "I'd fight if I thought it would be any use. But there's more to it than you think. This isn't an inquiry into whether I was guilty of letting those blacks escape, not even of whether I've been selling information to the Mau Mau. God knows it shouldn't be difficult to disprove those cock-and-bull accusations."

"Then disprove them," she cried passionately. "Don't let them brand you without a fight."

"I'm branded already," Denny said sadly. "The D.C. who wouldn't believe in 'my people, right or wrong'. The D.C. who had the impertinence to say that the blacks have some rights in this country too."

"Oh," she said, "you dramatise it so much. Anyone would think . . ." She broke off and looked at him with real anger. "The truth of the matter is it's so much easier to make a martyr of yourself than to go in there with the will to fight."



## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### 1

THE COURT OF INQUIRY was held in the Provincial Commissioner's office at Manake, and for a few days the town became focal centre of the Colony. The news that an inquiry was being held into the conduct of a District Commissioner, briefly reported in the local paper, was picked up by the national dailies and echoed across the wires to Fleet Street. At Westminster a Socialist M.P. asked a leading question: Was a district officer being victimised for his sympathy with the native people? The more sensational newspapers, fortunately tied by the fact that the case was still *sub judice*, still managed to convey the impression that the unfortunate officer was a victim of prejudice. As it happened their sympathy was singularly ill-judged. Opinion in the Colony, which from the first had been slightly against Denny, swung against him so rapidly in resentment against this overseas criticism that he was firmly condemned in the minds of most Europeans before the court was even convened.

It sat through two long rainy days. The steady down-pour, although depressing enough to Denny, who woke that first morning feeling more alone than he had ever been before, was in fact a blessing, for it kept away the sight-seers. The town was full of reporters. Neither rain nor Denny's steady refusal to talk could quench their thirst for scandal. They were waiting in hired cars, sheltering in the local Indian stores (for the P.C. would not allow them in his office) and as Denny drove up in his lonely Buick they surged forward through the mud and puddles. For a moment Denny stood confused. Through the driving rain he could see their waving arms, eager, dripping faces,

approaching, surrounding like the spirits of a nightmare. They flung round his shoulder, pressed against his wounded hand. No mob could have been more determined. "For heaven's sake!" He was too bewildered to struggle.

Then like an angry terrier a man came forcing his way through the pack. "Make way there! Do ye want to murder the puir laddie!" Uncle Angus. His wiry, determined figure was through to the centre of the mêlée. Grasping Denny's arm he charged back again to the steps, with flashing arm, kicking, spitting invective.

Denny paused inside the doorway. There was mud on his coat and on the new bandage on his hand. But he was whole. He said, "Thanks."

"Here." Uncle Angus took a flask from his pocket. "Take a drop o' this."

"No, thanks." Denny took off his dripping raincoat. "This is one day I've got to stay sober—until it's over."

"Weel," said Angus gruffly, "if things go wrong—you can wait for me. We'll make a night of it together."

In the reception office the witnesses were waiting in various moods: the old lady, coldly triumphant; Mr. Stanhope and Ian, embarrassed; Palethorpe, indignant; Mohammed, commiserating. There was no sign of Barbara. The P.C. came out opportunely. "Hallo, Denny." He shook hands. "Come into my private room." He said, when they were alone, "I can't talk now. They've convened me on to this blasted court. Still, maybe that's a good thing. . . . I don't know. . . ." He looked speculatively at Denny. "How are you feeling?"

"Strictly sober." Denny grinned. "And full of fight."

"Good, good!" The P.C. touched his shoulder. "Keep that way. I'm afraid . . . they'll probably call you last. . . . Maybe a long wait. . . ."

"I can wait."

"And . . . be careful, Denny. Whatever they say, whatever they ask, don't let them rile you."

## 2

The president of the court was a colonel from Nairobi. On his right was another district officer named Foinette and an elderly lawyer from Nakuru. The P.C. sat on the president's left with the stenographer. Denny was alone in outcast state by the window.

They all rose as Mrs. Stanhope came into the room and they remained standing until she was seated. She was, Denny thought, an oddly impressive figure with her straight back, hooked nose, and imperious mouth. Her hands were grasping her stick.

"Mrs. Stanhope," the president began, "you know why this court has been called. It was, I understand, on facts or—er—accusations made by you that the Government decided an inquiry should be held and that—er—D.C. Denny should be temporarily suspended."

"Permanently, I hope," the old lady said.

"Yes, well, we mustn't express opinions. We have to discover facts."

"The man's a drunkard and a renegade. . . ."

"Mrs. Stanhope! I must ask you—no opinions!"

"They're not opinions. They're facts."

Denny looked at the president, who was fumbling with his papers and, seeing the uncertain gesture, he realised with dismay that however firm the colonel might be with men he was no hand at commanding women. Mrs. Stanhope would ride over his objections at will.

The colonel said, "I have here a copy of the letter you sent. I see it's signed by several people."

"All farmers, responsible people. All God-fearing men."

"But you, I take it, can act as their spokesman?"

"I can."

"Mrs. Stanhope," the colonel said, "I've—naturally—read your deposition with great care. There are some very definite accusations here."

"They can be proved."

"Yes—well—that's what we are here to find out. I must point out—I'm sure it's hardly necessary for me to say this—the whole affair is very serious."

"Not more serious than the danger to the highland farmers if that man stays as D.C."

The colonel shifted his papers. "It seems to me that there are two separate accusations. You say, in effect, that D.C. Denny is not a suitable man for the job because, firstly, he's a drunkard."

"That shouldn't be hard to prove."

"And, secondly, that he has an excessive sympathy for the blacks."

"He's in league with them."

"Ah, now—I wonder if you could be more specific. What do you mean—he's in league with them? A Commissioner who's worth his salt tries to understand the natives in his district. You appreciate that?"

"Understand them! If you think it's necessary for him to live with them, to get drunk with them, to keep black women in sin. . . ."

"One moment, Mrs. Stanhope. Could we take this more slowly? When did all this happen?"

"In Mangayo."

"His old territory? What about here at Kanye?"

The old lady shrugged. "I don't doubt he's tried. He's only been here a few weeks, but I dare say he's got his harem somewhere."

The lawyer leant over to touch the colonel's arm. "With respect, sir, this all seems to be hearsay. Can the witness say that to her knowledge any of these things has happened?"

"Quite so. Quite so." The colonel flushed away from the correcting finger-tips. "Mrs. Stanhope, do I understand that you have no direct knowledge to substantiate this part of your accusations?"

"I don't know what you mean by *direct* proof. There's the Willoughby family at Butters Lake and the Reverend

Parkinson at Mangayo. They've told me many times and in letters."

"But you have no personal knowledge?"

The old lady regarded him frostily until he faltered before her stare. "You understand——? Rules of evidence . . . no hearsay . . . I'm sorry. . . ."

The lawyer repeated the question. "You have no personal knowledge?"

"No."

The P.C. leant over casually. "Don't you think, Colonel, we should delete that last part from the evidence?"

"What? Oh, well. . . . Yes, I suppose so," and to the stenographer, "Delete all that about the old territory." He turned again to Mrs. Stanhope. "Now, can you tell us anything which you *know* to be true concerning Denny's association with the blacks?"

Mrs. Stanhope said testily, "You've taken half my arguments away, but—the first time he came to my farm he talked a lot of nonsense about the injustices that had been done."

"What sort of injustices?"

"Oh, the usual Red propaganda—land stolen from the natives (as though they have any more right to it than we had!) and something about them being as good farmers as the whites if they had a lot of capital!"

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough? Is it good enough for you that a D.C. thinks that the white farmers he's supposed to protect are land-grabbers?"

"What he thinks," the colonel said, "is one thing. What he says though . . ." He asked, "Did he make any other specific statements?"

"He indicated that in these present troubles we were acting as badly as the Mau Mau."

"Did he say that?"

"He brought up two cases which, in my opinion, should never have gone to court. I told him that in both cases the finding was 'not guilty'."

"Can you remember the cases?"

"One was the policeman at Ligoni who killed three farm workers by mistake; the other was old Viljoen."

"I remember." The colonel asked, "Was there anything else?"

"Not at that time—not that I remember. Next morning before he left he talked on the same lines. I can't remember it all. My brother Angus may recall."

The old lady went on for a long time. To Denny, listening with a mind steeled against anger, her rigid animosity and prejudice should have been enough to invalidate most of her accusations, but he felt that the colonel and, possibly, the other members of the court might not be so tolerant. There was no doubt about it. He had criticised their caste.

When she had finished her evidence the colonel invited the other members of the court to question her. The lawyer made some minor points about Denny's exact words when he mentioned the two trials. Mrs. Stanhope could not, or would not, remember them. D.C. Foinette shook his head. The colonel looked to his left. "If the Provincial Commissioner would like to ask . . ."

The P.C. asked, "Mrs. Stanhope, how many times have you met D.C. Denny?"

"How many? I can't remember."

"Where have you met him?"

"At the farm."

"Anywhere else?"

"No."

"Has he called many times?"

"No. I disliked him from the first. I made it clear that he wasn't welcome."

"He wasn't welcome—can you tell us why?"

"I told you—I disliked him from the first."

The P.C. asked, "Does D.C. Denny want to marry your daughter?"

The old lady looked at him venomously. "Yes. He had the impudence to tell me that the second time he called."

"And you told him that he wasn't welcome?"

"I did."

"Did he respect your wishes?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did he call again?"

"No."

The P.C. said patiently, "So, in fact, you have only met Denny twice?"

Mrs. Stanhope looked as though she would like to dispute the statement, but at last she nodded, "I suppose that's right."

The P.C. said, "You have indicated that you disliked the thought of D.C. Denny as a husband for your daughter. Was there any other reason why he should be unwelcome at your farm?"

"He's a drunkard."

"That's what you say in your letter." He asked respectfully, "Have you any strong views on drink, Mrs. Stanhope?"

"You know well enough," she said, "that I won't have any sort of alcohol in the house, my children have never been tempted."

"So, obviously, if any man was a drunkard . . ."

"I wouldn't have him in the house. That's what I told Denny."

The P.C. was drawing on his pad. He asked, without looking up, "Have you ever seen a drunk man, Mrs. Stanhope?"

She flushed. "I don't know what you're referring to."

"Have you ever seen Denny drunk?"

"No."

The colonel said, "Well, as these points seem to have been cleared up satisfactorily, if there's nothing else . . ."

The P.C. said, "Just one thing more, Colonel." He said, "I do apologise, Mrs. Stanhope, for harping on this dislike of yours. I'm sure you understand—we must get all the facts. That's our job. Now, we've established that there were two reasons why Denny was not welcome at your farm.

He wanted to marry your daughter and he was, you considered, a drunkard."

"That's right."

"Was there any other reason?"

She looked at him warily over her stick, across the paper-strewn table. "Any other reason?"

"Did he offend you, for instance, by anything he said?"

"There was all that nonsense about the blacks. I told you——"

The P.C. leaned forward. "Did he mention the name of N'joro?"

Mrs. Stanhope was furiously angry. "I refuse to answer that." With lips pursed to a thin line, her hands gripping the stick, she said, "I knew you were a friend of that man! I knew you'd be on his side!"

The colonel rapped the desk and asked plaintively, "Who is N'joro? What has all this to do with Denny?"

The P.C. said, "There was an unfortunate accident some years ago on Mrs. Stanhope's farm. A houseboy, N'joro, was flogged to death."

The brutal statement sat like a skeleton at the table. No one cared to speak until the colonel, doing what he thought was his duty, asked, "But is this really relevant?"

"Probably not," the P.C. said. "I apologise to Mrs. Stanhope. I withdraw the question."

The colonel looked at Denny, who shook his head.

"No questions."

The court sat uneasily waiting for the next witness, Mr. Stanhope, to enter. Denny could feel the tension and the unwillingness to comment. Surely the old lady's demeanour had been enough to discount half of her accusations, and he hoped that the P.C.'s mention of the N'joro case would help the other members of the court to see her as she really was, narrow, unrelenting, bigoted. It was still pouring with rain. The continuous drumming on the windows brought an odd sense of security, as though here in this room words, damning accusations, could be aired without consequence,



and he almost forgot that his career lay in the balance.

Mr. Stanhope came clumsily into the room, edging his way round the half-open door, smiling uncertainly at the court. He confirmed much of what his wife had said—the derogatory reference to the two trials, the talk of injustice to the blacks—and because he spoke in a hesitant, almost apologetic manner, he was somehow more convincing than his wife. His evidence obviously convinced the court, the P.C. included, that a few weeks ago at least Denny had been definitely pro-black. They passed on to the night of the battle.

“You were in charge of a Police Reserve patrol that night?” the colonel asked.

“That’s right.”

“And you arrived, fortunately, in time to save the camp?”

“Yes, I suppose you can say that.”

“Will you describe what happened.”

Stanhope described the incredible mêlée, black bodies hacking, fighting, killing, in the first rising light of the moon.

The colonel asked, “And when the raiders had retreated . . . By the way, where did they go?”

“Up the ravine.”

“You decided to follow?”

“Yes. Our sudden appearance had put them to rout. I thought it absurd not to make full use of our advantage.”

“And how did you leave things in the camp?”

“Well, it was a proper shambles, but there was no more danger. I thought we should press on.”

“Were the other members of your patrol in agreement?”

“Oh yes. You see, we had been so long—months of riding out twice, three times a week with never a sniff of success.”

“And who was left in the camp?”

“There was D.C. Denny—he’d been pretty badly wounded. His cadet Palethorpe wanted to come with us, Denny said he could manage, so I agreed.”

“But you say Denny was wounded. Wasn’t there a chance

that he might not be able to carry on? I mean, the only white man. . . .”

“I thought of that. So I left de Groot, one of my men who knows something about first aid, to lend a hand. If Denny passed out, de Groot could take charge.”

“So there were, in fact, two white men left in the camp?”

“Yes, but of course Denny, as D.C., was in charge.”

The colonel leant across to the P.C. “Is this man de Groot being called.” The P.C. nodded.

“What do you know about the prisoners?” the colonel asked, turning again to Stanhope.

“Well——” Stanhope wriggled uneasily. “I don’t know as much as you’d think. When we had cleared out the Mau Mau there was still a good deal of confusion in the camp. There was scarcely any light. There were dead and wounded wherever you trod. But two of my men, using their heads, went to investigate a noise from the side of the camp. They found four Kikuyu struggling to get through the wire. I guess they’d lost their direction in the dark.”

“What happened then?”

“My men arrested them and I handed them over to Denny.”

“You handed them over. Was he quite clear as to what was happening? I mean, he understood they were unwounded prisoners?”

“Oh yes—at least . . . Now that I recall he seemed a bit distraught at the time.”

“That’s not unexpected, is it? I mean there had been a battle in which he had fought and been wounded. But he understood that they were prisoners?”

“Definitely. I think he was a bit upset because his boy had been wounded.”

“His boy?”

“His native boy, Ali. But he understood about the prisoners, because he handed them over at once to the corporal of his tribal police.”

The colonel sat back, frowning over his notes. He said at

last, "That seems to be clear enough. And now will you tell the court what happened when you returned from your chase?"

"Well, it was about dawn—light enough to see across the camp."

"And where was Denny?"

"In his tent. As we came down the hill he came out. I suppose he heard us. . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, he looked up towards us, I remember. I raised my hand but he didn't appear to see."

"What happened next?"

"He looked across the enclosure and then—well—he sort of panicked—rushing round to the other tents. Palethorpe, who was by my side, called out, 'What's the matter, sir? Have you lost something?' "

"And what did Denny say?"

"Nothing at first. He walked slowly across to the wire. I noticed his face was white, and I thought, Have to get him off to hospital, pretty quick. But he came right up to me and stopped. I said, 'Hello, Denny. Do you feel all right?' "

"Yes?"

"He put his hand to his forehead—I noticed how badly the bandage had been tied. He said, 'Those five prisoners—I've let them escape.' "

There was a short but well-marked pause. The colonel leant over the table and asked carefully, "You're sure that was what he said?"

"Quite sure. I know because I misunderstood him at first. I thought he meant he had let them go on purpose."

The P.C. touched the president's arm. "Excuse me, Colonel. Could I ask the witness whether he still believes Denny meant that?"

Stanhope moved uncomfortably. "Why no. I don't think he did *mean* it, but whether it wasn't the correct interpretation, whatever he meant, is another matter."

The colonel said, "Now, Mr. Stanhope, there's another

thing in this letter which I must ask you about. It is this rather dreadful suggestion that for some time the Mau Mau have been forewarned about the patrols of your Police Reserve and of the Home Guard and that D.C. Denny has been responsible."

Stanhope was really unhappy now. Denny could see how he might have been bullied by the old lady into accepting most of her accusations, but here was one that was beyond all belief. He said, "Well, I'm sorry. . . . Personally, I don't believe that there was or ever has been a leakage."

"But your signature appears on this letter."

"Yes—well. My wife was insistent, you see."

"But surely you wouldn't sign serious accusations like these if you didn't believe in them?"

"I—well—some I believed, some I couldn't accept."

The colonel said severely, "I shall see that that extraordinary statement appears in the records." He looked around. "If any other member of the court would like to question the witness . . ."

The P.C. asked in a friendly voice, "Mr. Stanhope, I wonder if you could go into a bit more detail about the scene when you fought your way into the camp. What was Denny doing?"

"He was defending the bridge."

The P.C. explained to his colleagues the importance of the bridge. Then he asked, "He was defending the bridge—can you tell us what you saw?"

"Yes. As I came into the camp the Mau Mau were already running. It was uphill and—well—I'm an old man."

"You didn't chase them?"

"I went across to the tents where the thick of the fighting had been. There seemed to be hundreds of bodies on the ground, some dead, some dying. . . ."

"Where was Denny?"

"He was on the lorry. The sections of the bridge had been left in the lorry overnight. Denny was up there, fighting like a tiger."

"How was he armed?"

"He wasn't. At least, he'd used all his tommy-gun ammunition. He'd been using the gun as a club. But he was still full of fight."

"A brave man."

"Oh yes. I don't think anyone is disputing the fact that he's a brave man."

"Or that he was instrumental in saving the bridge?"

"No. I think that's true."

The P.C. waited a full half-minute before he went on, "Can you tell me now what you saw of his wounds?"

"Well, I didn't see so much then. I told you there was only the faintest light. But when we brought him down to hospital I saw the bandages taken off. He was pretty badly knocked about."

"Can you be more specific?"

"Well, one arm—his left, I think—was slashed above the wrist. The other was useless because his hand had been smashed by a bullet wound."

The P.C. asked, "Do you think he was in much pain?"

"It must have been hell."

"So, if you had known the full extent of his wounds, would you have left the prisoners in his care?"

"Certainly I would. He had his police, and there was the man I'd left, de Groot."

The P.C. turned over the notes he had been making. "There is just one more point. It's been suggested, as you know, that there has been a leakage about patrol movements. You don't agree with that. Now, so far as I can make out, the main basis for this accusation is that for months your patrols met with no success, although the Mau Mau have been very active in the area."

"That's the opinion of some people. If you ask me, it's just a matter of luck. All that time without a success, then in the last few weeks both the Home Guard and the Reserve have made contact."

"By altering the pre-arranged route," D.C. Foinette observed.

"Yes—well—that was just the way it happened. I'm sure there's no significance."

The P.C. went patiently on, "You said in your earlier evidence that the patrols" . . . he quoted "'months of riding twice, three times a week, and with never a sniff of success'."

"That's correct. As I told you, it's just the way things happened."

"Yes, but the point I want to clear up is this—surely your lack of success must date back to long before Denny came?"

"I suppose it must."

"And if there were a question of leakage, which I know you don't admit for one minute, D.C. Denny could hardly be responsible?"

Stanhope looked at him with dull eyes. He said, "Yes, I suppose you're right."

The colonel looked towards the window and again Denny shook his head.

When Stanhope had gone the colonel bent over his papers, guarding, it seemed to Denny, against the possibility of comment. The lawyer and Foinette were frowning at the table. Only the P.C. looked at Denny. His face was expressionless, and his gaze wandered vaguely to the streaming window, the fan, a picture on the wall. For a second it rested on Denny and then quickly moved away again. There was no sound above the driving rain-beat.

For some reason there was a delay before Ian Stanhope, the next witness, appeared. The colonel looked at his watch: twelve o'clock. The court orderly was crying round the building, "Mr. Stanhope, Junior, Mr. Stanhope, Junior." At last the door opened and Ian came cheerfully into the room. He sat down with the insolence of youth and proceeded to drive the colonel into a boiling rage. He wouldn't treat any question seriously. According to him the whole affair was ludicrous. There was only one fault with D.C. Denny. He had done what the Europeans in Manake had

said was impossible. He had driven a road from Venner's Gorge to the top of the escarpment *and* he had finished before the rains. No, he had never heard him running down the whites. No, he had never seen him drunk. Why, he pointed out, the man was a bloody hero, but instead of giving him a medal the white farmers, who would be safe because of his road, wanted to give him the boot.

Yes, he admitted, he knew Denny wanted to marry his sister.

When the court adjourned for lunch the P.C. offered to take Denny to his club, but was obviously glad when he refused.

Denny went out by a back door and walked through the pouring rain to the Marlborough. As he entered the dining-room and shook off his dripping raincoat he saw Barbara waiting for him by the window.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

SHE HAD THE WORST TABLE IN THE ROOM, with the rain spraying through the open fanlight and the gusty wind ruffling her hair. She looked alone and friendless and unhappy. Pity drove through the barrier of resentment so that he came to her in love. He said, "This is a fine spot you've picked!"

"I know. I wanted another table, but they're so busy. If I had known . . ." She explained miserably, "I couldn't be sure that you would come."

"Never mind." He covered her hand with his own and saw the freckled skin above her wrist. Her unattractiveness was more binding to him than beauty. She had the charm and sincerity of an awkward schoolgirl. In her eyes he saw the intense loneliness of one who had touched at the hem of love after a long and friendless girlhood, and because he wanted her to be happy again he edged round the subject of the inquiry. He said banteringly, "Well, you haven't been to see my road. You know it's finished?"

"Oh yes. When I heard—I was so proud."

"You can afford to be! It's a damn fine road. In a few weeks, when the rains are over, we'll cover the scrub to the highlands. You'll be able to drive down to Manake in half an hour."

"That will be wonderful."

"If you make it worth my while I might even arrange a small diversion. I could bring the road practically to your door."

She caught his grin and there were tears in her eyes, as her lips moved to laughter. "Now you're teasing." She asked, "Is it really finished? Up the escarpment, I mean?"

"It's finished, all right, and it's standing up to the rain. I had a note from Palethorpe. He drove up it yesterday—without chains. It's a blooming miracle!"



"It's wonderful."

He said, "I'm glad we finished it—when we did. Lucien betted against us. I dare say there were others."

"Never mind." She smiled as she patted his hand. "You showed them."

People were watching from the other tables, some furtively as they bent their heads to their forks, others, including a stout, red-faced reporter, with undisguised interest. The rain drummed on the tin roof and, striking the lintel with each flurry of wind, sent a feather of spray across the table. There were beads of moisture like pearls on Barbara's hair. The white-coated Indian waiters moved quietly backwards and forwards from the kitchen to the tables. The wine-steward came with dignity to the table. "Drink, sir?"

"No, thanks, unless——" Denny turned to Barbara and caught her bright, devoted look. "No, thanks."

"When this—is over," Denny said, "I'll take you down to Nairobi. We'll have a shopping spree."

"Oh," she said, "I'd love that. Do you know, I don't think I've been there more than half a dozen times in my life. I was down there when Ian flew to England and again when he came back."

"All the better," he said. "I've always steered clear of the place, but now we'll enjoy it together."

She responded nobly, pushing aside the difficulties they must overcome, the old lady's objection. She asked, "What are you going to buy?"

"Oh, I don't know. A present for you, perhaps."

"What sort of a present?"

"What would you like?"

She shut her eyes. "Something pretty, and useless."

"How about a handbag?"

"I've got a handbag."

He was careful not to laugh. "Well, you said something useless. If you have two handbags you can only use one at a time."

"I'd rather like a hat."

"A hat!" At first he could only think of the sun-faded velour she wore when riding. He tried to imagine her in something feminine and frilly. "Of course. If that's what you want." He added, practically, "You'll need a hat when we are married."

To his surprise she suddenly burst into tears. Her face pressed so fiercely into the bandages of his hand that he started with pain. "Now what's the matter?"

Although she was crying softly he knew that the other diners were watching, but he didn't care. He rested his free hand on her hair, feeling the faint moisture of the rain. He said, "Don't cry. I don't know what's upsetting you, but whatever it is there's nothing we can't sort out together." When she didn't answer or look up he asked, "Is it this inquiry?" He explained, "When you came in a few days ago I was still upset and bitter. I'm sorry for what I said. As a matter of fact I realise now it was lucky for me you came. I had no intention of defending myself. But I saw then that if I let them brand me I'd never get another job. This is all I'm good for—you understand that? Collecting taxes, building roads, settling village squabbles, acting the kindly uncle to a lot of black men. It's all I've ever learnt." He said, "If they chuck me out of this I'm finished. I can't ask you to marry me without a job."

She raised her head and looked at him with tears still wet on her cheeks. "You're so good."

He smiled. "Well, I can't remember being called that before."

She went on, "When I think that it's my family who have brought all this trouble on you I'm—oh, I'm so ashamed."

"It's nothing to do with you."

"Do you think that if you hadn't met me, if you hadn't decided to marry me, this inquiry would have happened?"

"Well, I *do* want to marry you, so there's no point in speculating."

She said, "Ever since I met you, when I first saw the almost incredible possibility of happiness, I have felt that

something must happen. At first it was too perfect and I loved you, oh so much."

"There are few things in life worth having," Denny said, "unless you fight for them. This—unpleasantness is something we must both face. Rightly or wrongly, I'm unpopular with the whites. If you marry me you'll always have that to live down."

She said passionately, gripping his arm until it hurt, "Do you think that I mind? Do you think I care one iota what people say, so long as we can be together?"

"Well," he said, smiling to divert her tears, "let's have some lunch. The first thing is to convince this blasted court of inquiry."

## CHAPTER THIRTY

### 1

THERE WAS A HEAVY AFTER-LUNCHEON AIR in the court-room. The colonel, who had been drinking, blinked owlishly over his papers; D.C. Foinette was yawning; the lawyer, whose stomach could rumble even above the beating of the rain, waited irritably for the next witness.

Mohammed came into the room. He walked brashly over to the table and stood there with the defensive over-confidence of a man with a memory of a thousand snubs. His right hand hung loosely at his side, ready to be shaken, ready to be ignored. The fierce set of his jowls seemed overbearing in a witness before a court. Only the P.C. realised that he had antagonised his colleagues before speaking a word.

The colonel asked shortly, "Your name is Mohammed Ali?"

"Yes."

"And you have been the principal contractor on the new road to the highlands?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that three men—at least three men—working for you were also members of the Mau Mau?"

"I did not."

"How did you come to employ these men?"

Mohammed shrugged. "They come to me, you understand, demanding work. If they are strong and seem reliable, and there is a vacancy, I employ them."

"Are they screened at all?"

"No." Mohammed moved his huge bulk on the chair. "Do you believe that by screening I could have picked out these or any other men?"

The colonel said severely, "You are here to answer questions, Mohammed, not to ask them." He went on, "In your work you must have had frequent contact with D.C. Denny?"

"Not as much as I would have liked."

"What does that mean?"

"Mr. Denny is a very fine man. I would have liked to know him as my friend."

The colonel looked at him speculatively. "Would you like to explain more fully?"

"Well, I said to Mr. Denny once that no one in the whole area can have his ear as closely to the ground as I have. I know what the Kikuyu were saying when he was appointed."

"What was that?"

"They were looking forward with new hope."

"Yes?"

"It was said that this new D.C. was a man in a million, a friend of the natives—in fact I can tell you definitely that in his old territory he always put the interests of the natives before the rights of his own people."

"Indeed!" Denny felt rather than saw the sudden rousing of hostility along the table. If Mohammed had wanted to damn him before the court he could hardly have succeeded more thoroughly.

The P.C. asked in a matter-of-fact voice, "Did you ever sell any drink to Mr. Denny?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ever give him any?"

"No, sir, unless . . ." His voice trailed away into caution.

"Unless what, Mohammed?"

"Well, there was one time, after a Mau Mau attack, when I went to see him. I took him a half crate of whisky."

"A half crate!" the colonel demanded. "Did he pay for it?"

"Oh, no. You see, I thought he might need it. Then, when he refused, I offered it to him as a gift. I thought—well—he might not have the money."

"And did he accept your gift?"

"No, sir."

"Thank you, Mohammed." The P.C. sat back, hoping he had done some good, but the dyspeptic lawyer took up the questioning. He said, "This so-called gift—wasn't it rather an expensive gesture?"

"Not to a friend who had recently had a narrow escape from death."

"You call him your friend, but you said earlier . . ."

Mohammed explained gently, "You do not need two people to make a friendship. That is a popular misconception. I can be Mr. Denny's friend although he may not be mine."

When Uncle Angus came in it must have been obvious to the most inexperienced eye that he was drunk. Yet he bore himself well and talked intelligently even if he seemed inclined to fly into a rage at the slightest provocation. No, he had never heard D.C. Denny criticising the whites—some of those damned farmers wanted a few home truths anyway! No, he had never seen him drunk. Yes, they were right in assuming he had refused to sign his sister's letter of condemnation. In his opinion it was a load of bull.

Did he think there was any leakage of information? Ah, now that was another matter.

The colonel rose out of his irritability and questioned eagerly, "So in your opinion there has been a leak?"

"Aye."

"Going on for some time?"

"Aye."

The lawyer asked, "If I may ask a question, Mr. President, I'd like to get this quite clear. Does the witness mean that someone has been deliberately passing information about our patrols to the Mau Mau?"

"No one said anything about deliberately," Angus said.

"You mean it could have happened through negligence?"

"Aye."

The colonel asked carefully, "Have you formed any opinion as to the identity . . . ?"

"Who's to blame?" Angus cut in. "No, I haven' a clue. But if it's any help to ye I'll tell ye who isn't."

"Yes?"

"It won't be yon laddie that Barbara's going to marry."

The next witness, de Groot, repeated in a more sober fashion most of Uncle Angus's evidence. He too thought there had been a leakage. It was too much of a coincidence that the only successes the patrols had gained had come when the routes or the times had been changed.

The colonel questioned him about the night of the battle. "Were you there when Major Stanhope handed over the prisoners to Denny?"

"I was."

"In your opinion did Denny fully understand what was happening?"

"Well, he was pretty badly knocked about, man. His wounds must have been hurting pretty badly, and he was upset because his native boy was dying."

"It is understood," the colonel said pettishly, "that in battle there are a good many distractions. All I'm trying to establish is whether D.C. Denny understood that the prisoners were being handed to his keeping."

"Oh, he understood that, all right."

The lawyer asked some question. With indigestion tearing at his inside he was ready to argue with the devil. "What were you doing when the prisoners escaped?"

"I guess I was sleeping."

"You guess?"

"Well, I don't know. I don't know when they escaped or how. It may have happened while I was tying up those black zombies or it may have been later while I was asleep."

"Did you feel justified in sleeping at a time like that?"

"Well, heck, I'd had a pretty stiff night. Been out the night before, too. If I'd stayed up, Denny wouldn't have gone to sleep—not with his boy dying of wounds. There didn't seem much point in both keeping awake."

"The thing is," the colonel said, "as I understand it, the

prisoners were at no time in your charge. Denny didn't hand them over to you?"

"No, sir."

The colonel straightened his back and stretched. "Well, gentlemen. It's five o'clock. I suggest we adjourn until tomorrow."

2

It was still raining as Denny drove back to his hotel. Water was cascading from the roofs, swirling down the gutters to be sucked in miniature whirlpools to the greedy drains. It was as though after the months of unbroken sunshine the parched earth could never quench the mighty thirst. Naked children paddled in the roads, while their mothers moved from store to store under gigantic umbrellas; the native men squatted in doorways with damp cigarettes hanging loosely from their lips. From the verandas of the London and the Kenya Palace and from the long window of Tommy's Bar the white folk stared through the driving rain and dreamed that they were at home.

The Marlborough was still full of reporters, who had tracked Denny to his hiding place, but he pushed through them without talking and went upstairs to his room. From his bed he could look directly towards the eastern escarpment. On a fine day he could see parts of the road, like red weals on the shoulder of the mountain, but this evening he could scarcely see beyond the edge of Flamingo Lake. There was a coolness in the air, a relaxation, as though the whole countryside had surrendered willingly to the onslaught.

This was the time that Denny loved, a period of rest and fulfilment after the arid nerve-stretching months of drought. If he ever had to leave Africa this is what he would remember—the grey curtain of rain softening the hard-cut lines; the hypnotic beat on the roof; children and pye dogs in the gutter; red mud splashing against white walls.



But he would never leave Africa. In any other land he would be like an uprooted plant in shallow soil. He couldn't live anywhere else. And, remembering Barbara, her helpless, pitiful charm, the freckled face and sandy hair, he knew how much was at stake. Tomorrow: the night which was already settling over the town, another daybreak and then tomorrow. Before another nightfall he would know what his future would be; whether, in fact, there would be any future at all. He clenched his unwounded hand and beat against the bed. "I must win. I must win."

## 3

The court orderly called, "Mr. Palethorpe, Mr. Palethorpe," and the boy was inside the room before he had finished the second calling. He stood uncertainly, not knowing whether to salute or stand to attention, and at last it was the P.C. who made the friendly gesture. "Come and sit down, Palethorpe." It seemed as though the colonel and his colleagues from Nairobi, starting the day with renewed vigour, saw in the pink-faced, nervous cadet a victim for their zeal. The colonel started, "Now, you're Palethorpe, Thomas Palethorpe?"

"That's right, sir."

"And you are the cadet for Kanye district?"

"Yes, sir."

"Speak up!" the colonel ordered. "Don't want to waste time having to repeat everything."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"All right then. Now—you've been working with D.C. Denny on this road?"

"That's right, sir."

"How have you got on?"

"With the D.C.? I think he's the finest man I've ever met."

"Indeed!" The colonel's eyebrows arched. "In what way do you mean he's the finest?"

"Well, sir, he's deceptive at first. You think—I thought—that he was just a hard-bitten pioneer with no time for the new whites, newcomers like myself." He glanced apologetically towards Denny and blushed.

"No?"

"But I soon found I was wrong. He's the most considerate of men."

"To you?"

"Not only to me. He looked after the workmen. We had nearly a hundred blacks on the road, many of them short-term prisoners from Kanye. It's a pity you can't hear what they say about him."

"What do they say?"

"That they've never worked for such a master. Good pay—he started a new system of piece-work which was a tremendous success, rations always ready on time, hot meals. He made them work, mind you. I've seen him swearing and cursing as though he hated the lot of them, but still when evening came he was never too tired to listen to their absurd family troubles."

The colonel paused as though impressed despite himself. "And between you you finished the road?"

"Yes, sir. Once again, I wish you could see it. It's a tremendous achievement; and I can say that because not much of the credit is mine. I only carried out D.C. Denny's instructions as well as I could."

Palethorpe went on to describe the road, the natural hazards, the race against the rains, and the constant threat of the Mau Mau. Confidence came with enthusiasm and his pleasant boyish features were warm with hero-worship. He told of the first skirmish with the Mau Mau and the later tremendous battle. It was Denny, Denny, Denny. Sitting tensely on his chair by the window Denny thought: This may clinch it. God bless the boy. I think he'll save me yet.

At last the colonel threw the questioning to his colleagues. The P.C. shook his head. D.C. Foinette replied firmly, "No questions."

"I would like to ask," the lawyer began, "whether the witness has ever noticed any—er—tendency to drink overmuch in his D.C."

Palethorpe replied shortly, "If you mean have I ever seen D.C. Denny drunk the answer is 'No, sir'." Because he was angry his voice was tinged with insolence, and the lawyer flushed to anger. "Then I must ask the witness a few more questions."

In a moment the case veered away from Denny. The lawyer became more cold and precise as Palethorpe grew angry. There were bald irrefutable facts which the cadet could not deny: the hip flask, the whisky in the tent. Denny's remark as he announced the loss of the prisoners. The lawyer ferreted back to the first encounter with the Mau Mau. "You say that one of the raiders ran past you."

"On the other side of the donga."

"Didn't you fire at him?"

"I couldn't for fear of hitting the D.C."

"Did he fire?"

"Of course."

"But he missed?"

"Yes—well—I'm not sure. I thought I saw the man stumble, but it was so dark. One couldn't be sure."

The lawyer looked at his notes. "You said, in referring to D.C. Denny's many attributes, that he was a crack shot."

"That's true. I've seen him take a snap shot at a guinea-fowl running through bushes and bring it down as easily as you like."

"At what sort of distance?"

"Two hundred yards, maybe more."

"What distance would there have been between Mr. Denny and this Mau Mau raider who escaped?"

"Well, fifty yards, I suppose, but it was dark."

"Quite so."

As the probing questions continued Palethorpe grew more and more rattled. He was caught out in inconsistencies, he contradicted himself. By the time the lawyer

had finished it seemed to Denny that all Palethorpe's earlier testimony would be forgotten.

The colonel looked at his pad. "I see there's only one more witness. Time to hear him before lunch and then, afterwards, we'll hear you, Denny." He read out the name. "Lucien, C. Lucien. Well, damme, I wonder if it's the same man."

"Do you know him, Colonel?" the P.C. asked dismally.

"Know him! If it's Christopher Lucien I know him all right. Damn fine chap. Served under me—was my adjutant in Burma."

It was the same Lucien all right. He came in wearing the grin that was so near to a sneer. The colonel shook him warmly by the hand and they sat facing each other like buddies joined by a tie of memories.

"Now, Chris," the colonel began, "I want you to help as much as you can. I'm sorry about all this. I mean, damn unpleasant talking about your superior officer, but there's nothing personal in this as far as you're concerned. You'll have to put your better feelings aside. Tell us all you know."

"All the facts," the P.C. added dryly.

"Well, sir," Lucien made a deprecating gesture, "it's difficult for me, as you say. I really think—if it's all the same to you—if you could ask me some questions, I'll do my best."

"Very well then," the colonel said. "Have you ever seen Denny the worse for drink?"

Lucien lowered his eyes.

"This is all strictly confidential," the colonel went on. "You realise that?"

Lucien said, with apparent reluctance, "Well, sir, I can't deny that I have seen him drunk," and quickly, "although I dare say there were special circumstances."

"Maybe. And how many times have you seen him like that?"

"Well, he was certainly drunk when he arrived at Kanye."

The colonel tut-tutted. "As early as that! How bad was he?"

"That's not an easy question, sir."

"Could he stand?"

"Oh yes. I think so."

"Could he stand or couldn't he?" the P.C. asked. "Surely that's a simple question."

"If you don't mind——" the colonel said, mottling.

"I'm sorry, Colonel, only I'm at a loss to understand how Denny could have got so drunk in such a short time. He was sober enough when he left me, a couple of hours before."

"I don't want to give a wrong impression," Lucien said hurriedly. "Although he was certainly drunk he could stand all right. He staggered a little as he got out of the car." He added as an afterthought, "I noticed an empty whisky bottle beside his seat."

"What did he do after he arrived?"

"It was tiffin time. We went into the bungalow."

"Did he have any more to drink?"

"Well, yes."

"Much?"

"More than I would have cared to take."

Hostility settled in the room. Denny could feel it gathering like a storm cloud ready to burst on his head when he came in after lunch. The steady build-up went on, damning facts, innuendoes, telling hesitations. From the chair by the window he listened with something like horror. It was like watching a macabre performance by a gifted actor. Whatever the members of the court thought—and it was plain that they were impressed—Denny could only see this as a deeply planned attack by a man who not only hated him, but was willing to risk a determined effort to bring about his downfall.

"Have you ever seen him with any black girls?"

"No, sir, only I've often thought . . . the way he looks at them . . . and then of course there's his friendship with

Mohammed." It all came out—Mohammed's visits to the camp, Denny's calls at Banare, even the near accident with the car at Kipango. Palethorpe's name was mentioned and small bleak facts were added—his fears, his drinking, his debt with Mohammed. How Lucien had rooted out these facts was a mystery, but now the boy's adulation of his D.C. took on another unpleasant significance.

It was twelve-thirty before Lucien had finished. He stood up apologetically and grinned. "I hope, sir . . . I mean, I feel very badly about all this. After all, Mr. Denny is my D.C."

"Don't worry about it, my boy," the colonel said. "You only did your duty." He looked round towards the window. "Any questions?"

Denny closed his eyes against anger. There could be little doubt that his cause was already lost, but some perverse stubbornness made him cling to the last straw of hope. If he argued now with Lucien it would mean abandoning even that fragile chance. He looked at a point on the farther wall. "No questions."

The colonel looked relieved. "Well, gentlemen, we've heard enough for this morning—quite enough. I suggest we adjourn now and meet again at two o'clock. Then, Denny, we'll hear your story."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

### 1

AT FIRST Denny was not aware of faces, only a row of hostile eyes like warning signals beyond the table. Then the P.C. looked up. His face, non-committal at first, relaxed for a second to a smile and returned as quickly to gravity. His puckered eyebrows signalled, "Careful. They're all against you."

"Now, Denny," the colonel began, "I don't have to tell you what this is all about. Certain accusations have been made—accusations serious enough to warrant an investigation. The Government thought—in the best interests of all concerned—that . . ." His voice trailed off.

"That I should be suspended."

"Yes. Well, you've had a chance to see this letter. You've heard all the witnesses. You've had plenty of time to prepare your defence."

"Defence! Is this a trial then?"

The colonel hedged, "No. You know—I spoke figuratively."

"Well then, I haven't prepared any defence. There's nothing to defend. I'll be glad to answer any questions the court care to put to me."

"Thank you!"

Denny knew that he was starting badly, but he couldn't help himself. The colonel's sarcasm, the P.C.'s frown, should have put a brake on anger, but prejudice was there across the table, red tabs, the lawyer's collar, Foinette's look of disgust. Tolerance or prejudice: there could be no compromise.

The colonel said in a formal voice, "The accusations against you are, firstly, that you have consorted too openly

with the blacks, that you have in fact invariably put their interests before those of the whites; secondly, that you—you make a habit of drinking to excess; thirdly—the most serious of all—that either through negligence or perhaps even by intention you have passed on valuable information to the Mau Mau.” He looked up sharply, “What is your reply to all that?”

“You were going to ask me questions,” Denny said evenly.

“All right then. Let’s take the first count. Have you consorted openly with the blacks?”

“Of course. Isn’t that my job?”

“Your job is to administer your district, to collect taxes, to administer justice to the native population, to ensure the Government orders are carried out.”

“Am I expected to do all that without consorting with the natives?”

The colonel leant across the table. “Look here, Denny, I want to warn you. There is a pretty bad case against you. You’d do well not to treat it lightly. Nor will it pay you to antagonise the court.”

For a moment Denny caught the P.C.’s expression, and it pulled him up before the damage was irrevocable. He said, “I apologise, sir, if I’ve antagonised the court. As for treating this matter lightly, I ask you to put yourself in my position. If you had served for twenty years as a district officer, would you be amused to have these sort of stories thrown up at you?”

“All right then. Let’s go on to more specific questions,” the colonel said. “It has been said in this court—and, as you know, this was hearsay evidence which will not appear in the records—it was said that in your old district of Mangayo you were far more to the natives than just a district officer.”

“I suppose that’s true. I hope it’s true.”

“You hope it’s true?”

“Yes. I’d been in that territory for ten years or more. I knew the natives, well—almost like brothers. I’d been with



them through sickness and childbirth, in good times and bad. I was there in the bad drought, and I had been with them when the locusts came. They were far more to me than natives: they were my friends."

"It has been said that you—er—took advantage of your friendship, well—with the native women."

Denny waited with an expressionless face.

"Did you, in fact, keep a harem of black girls?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ever—live with a black woman?"

"Oh, yes." The admission seemed to catch them off balance, and he watched their faintly startled expressions without comment. He knew that if he said any more it would sound like an apology.

At last the colonel said, with an edge of disgust in his voice, "Have you had any black women here, in Manake?"

"I've been too busy with the road." He wasn't going to have Barbara's name brought into this if he could help it. "I'd like to ask," he added, "whether there was any complaint—any *official* complaint—about the record of my old district."

"We'll ask the questions, Denny, if you don't mind."

"Then I'd like to request the court that they get a report on my old district from P.C. Mangayo."

"It's here, Denny," the P.C. broke in unexpectedly, "I sent for it myself."

The colonel looked startled for a moment, and then went on, "We come to the next point—drunkenness."

"I'll save you a lot of questions," Denny said. "In my old territory I drank pretty heavily. Since I've been here I've stayed sober."

"Do you mean that you're a reformed character, that you don't drink at all?"

"I didn't say that. I drink as much as any normal man, as much as you, sir. As for being a reformed character . . ."

"If we're to believe in this sudden change," the colonel said, "and you must remember that we've had conflicting

stories on this point—it would help if you could—well, give us the reason for it.”

“I suppose you can give the road credit for this too.”

“So that when the road is finished . . .”

“Isn’t it true,” the P.C. asked, “that there is another reason?” and, as Denny looked stubborn, “The court already knows that you are going to marry a white girl. Isn’t that the real reason why you stopped drinking?”

“Yes,” Denny said. “It is.”

The colonel looked as though he intended to speak, and then turned to his notes. “Now we come to this point about the prisoners who escaped. We’d like to hear your version of that story.”

Denny told them of the long wait for dawn in the stricken camp. He did not mention his own wounds or the indescribable confusion following the battle. His report was factual and correct.

“It was quite clear to you then,” the colonel asked, “that the prisoners had been put in your charge?”

“Quite clear.”

“Did you do anything to make sure they were safe?”

“I told my corporal to put an armed guard over them.”

“Did you see the prisoners?”

“Yes.”

“Did you speak to them?”

“Yes. I went over there with Corporal Lamissah. That was when I discovered that three of them were Mohammed’s men.”

“How far from the centre of the camp were these prisoners?”

“About a hundred yards.”

“Wouldn’t it have been safer to keep them nearer yourself?”

“Safer, yes, but not practicable. There were rows of dead and wounded across the centre of the camp. The place was a battlefield.”

“Where were you when the prisoners escaped?”

"In my tent."

"Had you been there long?"

"About two hours."

The P.C. broke in, "Wasn't it true, Denny, that you were pretty badly wounded and in a good deal of pain?"

"It was true, sir, but that wasn't the reason why I was in my tent."

"Why were you in your tent?" the colonel asked.

"Because my boy was dying."

"Your boy?"

"My personal boy—Ali."

"They'd been together a long time," the P.C. observed, and had the colonel's pencil waved admonishingly across his face.

"Can you remember," the colonel asked, "how you announced the loss of prisoners to Major Stanhope?"

"Well, hardly, it's some time ago now."

"Did you say 'Those five prisoners, I've let them escape'?"

"That's probably what I said."

"Isn't that rather an odd way of expressing it?"

"I don't think so."

"Let me ask you this question," the colonel said. "Do you consider that the loss of prisoners was your responsibility and yours alone?"

"Yes, I do."

The unexpected admission seemed to affect the attitude of the court. They stopped looking at Denny as though he was some strange freak, and there was a note almost of respect in the colonel's voice as he asked, "You have heard these theories that the time-table of Police Reserve and Home Guard patrols was somehow communicated to the Mau Mau?"

"Yes."

"Do you think there's anything in them?"

"I do."

"Have you any idea how such a leakage might occur?"

"None at all, but if I were Major Stanhope, I'd scrap all

the times and routes of my patrols—and I would check up pretty carefully on everyone who is notified of the time-table.”

“Did you suggest this to Major Stanhope?”

“I did. At least, I suggested he should alter the patrols.”

“But not a check up?”

“No. You see, I wasn’t exactly popular when I suggested there might be a leakage. I thought if I could persuade him to alter the patrols we should at least be that much safer.”

“You put this to Major Stanhope?”

“Yes.”

“Was there—you must forgive me putting it like this, Denny—but was anyone else present?”

“Yes. A patrol had come to my camp, I said it before them.”

“Can you remember who they were?”

“Well, there was Major Stanhope, the boy Ian—although if I remember rightly he didn’t stay while this was discussed.”

“Anyone else?”

“There was de Groot and his brother and some bloody fool of an Englishman whose name I can’t remember.”

“Villiers?” the P.C. suggested.

“That’s right.”

The lawyer said, “If I could ask a question—Mr. President——” He turned to Denny. “Do you receive a copy of this time-table?”

“I have two copies.”

“How do they come?”

“Usually with the ration lorry. There are two envelopes marked, ‘Top Secret’. A white corporal brings them from Manake.”

“One of my men,” the P.C. said. “He’s safe enough.”

“And then—where do you read these copies?” the lawyer asked.

“I read one. The other is sent on to my assistant Lucien at Kanye.”

"How is that sent?"

"Well, until Ali was killed that was his job; now my cadet Palethorpe takes it."

"Ali? Wasn't he a native?"

Denny looked surprised. "Yes. He was." He was surprised because he had never even considered Ali as a suspect, he had hardly considered him a native. He added, "But he was absolutely reliable."

"I see."

The colonel, who had been sorting out his notes during these exchanges, took up the questioning again. He said, "There are still some points which we must discuss. Let's take this accusation that you have sided unfairly with the blacks. Have you any comment to make?"

"I've sided with them," Denny admitted, "I don't think unfairly."

"I see. Is this something you hold rather strong views over?"

Denny said, "I did hold strong views. Now I'm—well, confused."

"Did you say to Mrs. Stanhope that the white farmers were more or less land-grabbers?"

"Something like that."

"And did you discuss the trial of a policeman at Ligon?"

"I may have."

"And of a Boer named Viljoen?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"Did you indicate that, despite the verdicts, these men were really guilty of murdering, or ill-treating, harmless natives?"

"I may—yes, I suppose so."

"It seems to me," the colonel said severely, "that these are extraordinary statements for any Government officer to make, let alone the Commissioner of a native district."

"Yes, I suppose it must seem like that."

"If you really think that the whites are the villains of the piece and that the natives are poor down-trodden creatures

who can do no wrong, do you consider that you are a proper person to have the responsible post of District Commissioner, especially at a time when the balance between white and black is so finely adjusted?"

Denny shifted in his chair. They were, he knew, all looking at him, and they knew that he was aware of the justice in the colonel's remarks. Was he a fit person to be District Commissioner? He said quietly, "A few months ago I was convinced that the only answer to the troubles in Africa was native emancipation. You've heard that I understand the blacks and love them; that is true. When I came to this area, into the centre of the Mau Mau trouble, I was still indignant that they should be suffering from troubles which seemed to me a direct result of white oppression. And believe me, they are suffering. You don't have to visit many villages to find out. The people to be sorry for in this outbreak are not the highland settlers, but the loyal Kikuyu, the small farmers, the headmen, who bear no grudge against the white man. They want no change in the order of things; they were happy until this trouble came. Now they are in the front line: in their lonely huts they live with terror, and when trouble comes to their village they are as likely to be killed by the whites as by the Mau Mau. Those are the people I want to defend. They are the real victims of this trouble."

He paused, livid with conviction, while the arguments simmered in his brain. He went on, "Of course I must defend my own people too. I've nothing against the whites—after all, I'm going to marry one. But I find it hard to forgive their prejudice, their stubborn refusal to yield one inch of prerogative. The reason I am here today, as you must know in your hearts, is not that some prisoners escaped from my care or that I used to get drunk twice a week. It's simply that I offended against the rules of caste. I had the impertinence to surrender the white prerogative."

He went on slowly, "Oh, I've made enough mistakes in my time. It took a Mau Mau killing up at Kipango to make

me see what this threat really means. But now, I've had twenty years out here, most of them spent with the natives. I see now what I couldn't see even a few weeks ago, that no one is entirely blameless—white or black, Government or Mau Mau. The only answer is tolerance, a surrender of prerogative by the settlers and peaceful negotiation by the blacks. I'd like to think that it will come in my time."

And now he looked at them fully to refute their accusation, and it was almost as though the positions were reversed, as though he were the prosecutor and they the accused. He said, "It has been hinted that I am in league with the Mau Mau, that I've sold my own countrymen for my beliefs. If that were so do you think I'd have been fool enough to get myself involved? At the first raid near our camp I was an inch or two from death. My cadet Palethorpe saved me. In the battle we had a week or so back do you think it was necessary to let this happen?" He held up his hands, "I fought that night for what I believed. I fought to defeat the Mau Mau. The whole conception of the road was to strike a blow at the heart of the Mau Mau. It's a military road. Surely that must be clear. Do you think for one minute that it would have been finished before the rains, that it would have been finished at all, if I had tackled it with less than determination?"

He stopped, breathing hard in agitation, his eyes challenging them to accuse him. The colonel said uncomfortably, "Well, Mr. Denny, we've heard all the evidence. If you could wait outside a few minutes. . . ." It was the first time he had addressed Denny as *Mr.*

## 2

They deliberated for half an hour and at the end of the time Denny was recalled and reinstated as District Commissioner.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

### 1

ONE RESULT OF THE INQUIRY was that Lucien was transferred to a new territory; another was that the European community in Manake closed its ranks securely against their District Commissioner.

Lucien's transfer came as a surprise. A signal was received one morning that he was to move next day. Denny helped him to pack. He bore no grudge against his assistant and in fact could only feel a faint sense of guilt that the move had been brought about by the inquiry.

Lucien took it well, that is to say he grinned continuously from the moment he opened the signal, through the afternoon of hurried packing, the farewell drinks, until he was ready to climb into the lorry that was to take him down to Nakuru. He stood with one foot on the running-board looking out over the parade ground, the hospital, the district offices, down to the Indian shops which clung round the native quarter. He giggled nervously with a sharp intake of breath and said, "Well, sir, I wonder what my next headquarters will be."

"Better than this," said Denny. "At least you'll be free of barbed wire."

"I suppose so. They've had no trouble yet."

"It will be like a rest cure."

"Yes, well. . . ." He held out a limp hand. "Good-bye, sir. I'm sorry I've got to go."

"I'm sorry too," Denny said.

And then a flicker of the old malice. "At least, sir, you'll still have Palethorpe."

The lorry churned down the muddy track towards the valley road. Mohammed stood outside his house, watching, but he made no sign of farewell. The lorry was hidden



behind the native huts and soon only the churning of its engine as it ploughed towards the river remained as a memory of Lucien.

But another irritation remained. While Denny's position was at stake he had attracted a certain amount of sympathy, despite Mrs. Stanhope's barbed tongue, but when he was reinstated the Europeans took it as a veiled insult to their clan. In the bars and hotels of Manake and in the highland farms the stories which Mrs. Stanhope had started grew and multiplied and were believed. No one doubted now that the Mau Mau knew all about the patrols, and there were few who did not believe that Denny was responsible. It hardly affected him directly, for he was seldom in the town, but he knew that the mystery would have to be cleared up before he could marry Barbara.

He was working on the road again, on the easy slopes above the escarpment, and he had no difficulty in getting away every few days to meet Barbara. They had to meet in secret, for the old lady had declared she would never allow him in the house, and it was at the edge of the forest shade that he met her one fresh sunny morning. She came radiantly down the hill, a girl riding to meet her lover. He thought how much she had changed. When she was with him the suppressed vitality came sparkling to happiness, so that her freckled skin and indifferent features were transformed to beauty. But still she balked at the suggestion of marriage. It was always, "Soon—be patient, darling—I can't just yet." They had a dozen quarrels, and as many reconciliations.

As he held her now he could see down the hill to Flamingo Lake, the pure azure of the water, the brilliant whiteness of the sand and, even at this distance, the broad circle of pink where the birds were feeding. Only a corner of the town showed round a shoulder of the hill. The dense woods clothing the hillside like a cloak were fresh and green after the rains.

Denny repeated what he had said a score of times before.

"Soon you must make up your mind. If you weren't so afraid of the old lady . . ."

"It's not only that, darling. You know."

"I know what you always tell me. But if we're to put off happiness indefinitely because your father may be bullied . . ."

She put her fingers to his lips, "Don't say it, darling. Don't let's quarrel."

"Well, then——"

"Soon." She soothed him like a mother with her child. "Soon—I promise."

He said, "It wouldn't be so bad, if the old lady would leave me alone. She's stirred up so much dirt, people think there must be something, whatever the court of inquiry decided."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, about the patrols, and the Mau Mau being warned."

"But you believe there's a leakage."

"I do. But I know damn well it doesn't come through me." He said restlessly, "If I could only track it down. It shouldn't be so difficult. There aren't so many people who *could* get the time-tables."

"Let's think of them now," she said. She was desperately anxious to please him.

He said, "Well, there's your father. He prepares the lists. Then I suppose there's Ian."

"And all the members of the Police Reserve."

"No. I've checked up. They know when they have to report, but they don't know the route they are going."

"I see. Well, that cuts it down a lot."

"There's the P.C. at Manake, and the officer in charge of the K.A.R."

"Anyone else?"

"Probably the Commissioner of Police. Then, of course, there's myself."

She said, "It seems incredible. I mean, that any one of them should be guilty."

"Guilty of carelessness," he said, "that's all"; and he thought of the dead Ali, Palethorpe, who was in debt to Mohammed, Lucien, the model officer. "Sometimes," he said, "I think we'll never know. The only thing is—if I can't find out, it's going to make life here unbearable. I don't mind for myself, but when we are married . . ."

She clung to him tightly, enclosing his arms within her grasp. "Don't worry, darling. It will all turn out all right. Each night I pray for us, for our marriage and happiness. Already my prayers have been answered. You were vindicated by the court. When you're least expecting it the way will seem clear—you'll see."

It became clear sooner than she could have expected. After she had ridden away over the brow of the hill, he stood smoking beside his car. He felt reluctant to return to the road, where, he knew, this problem would be forgotten. It had to be faced.

A movement farther up the hill caught his attention. At first he thought it was an eland feeding at the forest edge or a zebra moving through the impenetrable camouflage of shadows. But there was a man, a native, coming across the open ground towards the trees. Joseph, the Stanhopes' houseboy: he recognised him at once. He paused, furtively it seemed, as he reached the shadow, looked carefully around, and then ran quickly into the forest.

Denny started after him at once. In an area where murder was always round the corner, suspicious actions stood out like warning beacons. It hardly occurred to Denny that Joseph's intent could be less than criminal.

Through the forest paths, across sunlit glades, he followed the houseboy. Although he was walking as quietly as possible, his legs caught again and again in tearing briars and his feet crashed through the undergrowth, but Joseph

was always too far ahead to hear. He was moving fast, at a pace between a fast walk and a trot, as though whatever he had to do was urgent and best completed without delay.

When he was about half a mile from the edge of the forest, Joseph stopped. He stood in a considerable clearing and looked around uncertainly as though waiting for someone to appear.

Then from the deeper shadows another man stepped. He was a tall, magnificently-built Kikuyu, clad in a torn and dirty suit of khaki drill which had obviously at some time belonged to a white man. In his hand he carried a heavy, evil-looking panga. Denny drew his revolver and walked towards the clearing.

It was Joseph who heard him first. He had taken something from his pocket, a crumpled sheet of paper, when he stopped like a dog on the scent. They both came peering into the shadows, but in the sudden darkness they could not see Denny until he was only a few yards away.

He had expected that, taken at a disadvantage, they would surrender without a fight, but the man with the panga sprang suddenly into action. He swung viciously at Denny and missed, but the force of his charge carried him on into the undergrowth. Denny turned and fired, but already the man was hidden behind the greenery. Denny was about to follow when he heard Joseph running off in the other direction. He shouted "Stop!" and fired. Joseph stumbled, fell to his knees, and was dead before he could cross the clearing.

Denny walked slowly across, feeling a rising nausea at the unexpected violence. Joseph was lying face downwards on the turf with his head turned sideways like a man asleep. From the short sleeve of his jacket the smooth ebony arm reached out to the paper he had dropped.

Kneeling beside the body Denny spread the paper across his knee. It was a list of dates and times and routes, carefully copied by a man who could not read or write. Denny knew that he had traced the leakage of the patrols.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE DOOR WAS OPEN as he walked across the open lawn towards the farmhouse. He climbed the steps and entered the living-room without knocking. Mrs. Stanhope, who was knitting with an open Bible on her knees, flared out in anger, "What are you doing in this house? How dare you enter without knocking!" Barbara, who had been reading at the table, came white-faced to meet him. Her father raised his eyes and lowered them again in embarrassment. The old lady said again, "How dare you!"

"I'm sorry," Dehny said, "to break in like this. But I must see you."

"I won't have you in this house, and there's nothing we can discuss."

"I'm afraid there is."

"If you don't leave at once, I'll ring for Joseph."

"That wouldn't do any good," he said, "I've just shot him."

"You've what!" They all stood up, shocked into silence, while he came across to the chaise-longue and sat down. The still warm body of the black boy lay across his thoughts like a blanket of sorrow. He couldn't forget.

"You mean there's been an accident?" The old lady was the first to recover.

"Not an accident. I meant to shoot him."

"Then it's murder."

"No." He looked steadily, with a kind of sad triumph, at the implacable old woman who was his enemy. He said, "All these weeks you've been slandering me. You tried to break me at the inquiry, and, when that failed, you put out stories that became more and more fantastic." He waved aside her interruption, "Oh, I know. There's not a farmer in this territory who doesn't believe I've passed on information to the Mau Mau. If I hadn't stumbled on the truth today . . ."

"The truth?"

He held out the folded paper. "Do you know what this is?"

She held it proudly before her, sitting with rigid back on the chaise-longue. "I don't know. It seems to be . . . some dates, places in this area."

"It's the time-table of patrols." He leant across to indicate with his finger. "You see—Police Reserve this side, and Home Guard."

"Where did you find this?"

"I took it from Joseph's hand after I had shot him in the forest."

There was the stillness of doom in the living-room. The rustle of paper as Mrs. Stanhope lowered her hands was like a death-rattle. Denny could hear the frantic ticking of his wrist-watch. Without turning her head the old lady asked, "Where do you keep your lists?"

They all knew she was speaking to her husband, but he gave no sign that he had heard. He was sitting like a man paralysed, with a pen still poised ready to write and the empty sheet of paper. She turned slowly to face him, "Where do you keep your lists?"

He looked at her with the pitiful eyes of a dog waiting to be whipped. "In here." The pen rather than his words indicated the desk.

"Bring me your list for next week."

He half-rose, pushing the chair heavily against the wall, and bent, fumbling, over an inner drawer. "Here, I keep them in this book."

The last written page corresponded exactly to the list which had been in Joseph's hand. Even the alterations were the same, the words crossed out, the afterthought riding above, and the word *stet* showing twice in the same position it held on the original.

Anger and humiliation seemed to well up inside the old lady. Her face flushed and then went white; her hands grasped the stick until the skin seemed to disappear, leaving

two skeleton claws. Her profile was as malevolent as a death's head. She said, "So it's come to this! After all these years protecting you from your own weakness, shielding you and your bastard, guiding you, making your farm one of the best in the highlands—now we must sell it all because our District Commissioner can prove it is you, my husband, who is the renegade."

"Not a renegade, Jessie. A bit careless, perhaps, though how I was to know that Joseph . . ."

"A bit careless! You have a list of patrols that can mean safety to a hundred farms, a list that any normal man would guard with his life, and what—you leave it here in an unlocked drawer!"

"It was sometimes locked."

"Oh!" She spat out her disgust. "All my life I've despised you, but I've kept you here because of Ian. Now—oh——" She bent her head to her hands in the first human gesture Denny had seen. She waited. "We must sell up—at what sort of price? The Ambersons over at the Falls got two thousand pound for their place when they went home. Two thousand pound! Who's going to buy a place like this with the forest coming almost to our door?"

Her husband said, "There's no need to go to that extreme, Jessie. There's no need to sell up."

"No need! Do you propose we should stay here and become objects of ridicule throughout the colony?"

"Oh, well—it's not as bad as that. People will talk a bit, of course. I'll have to admit it was my fault, but soon it will all pass over. If it's just a matter of pride. . . ."

"A matter of pride! Do you think I'm going to stay here and let my Ian be pointed out as the son of a murderer?"

"Mother!" It was the first time Barbara had spoken. She came protectively towards her father, "How can you say such a dreadful thing!"

"A dreadful thing, my dear, but true," Mrs. Stanhope sneered. "Have you thought of all our friends along the highlands who have been wounded or killed these last few

months? They were attacked because those black devils knew exactly where the patrols were going and when. It's your father who is responsible for those deaths. It's your father who's the murderer."

"No, Jessie, no."

"And as for you, Mr. District Commissioner Denny," she said, turning to him with a glint of madness, "this must be a great moment for you. All these months I've been determined to break you; now it's you who will break me instead. You wanted to marry this girl against my will, and she came to you because marriage, any sort of marriage, even marriage to a drunken half-native, would be something to hide the disgrace of her illegitimacy."

"It's not true! Darling, don't believe her."

"And now you've won—you *think* you've won. But although you can drive me from the highlands you'll never marry this girl."

Denny stared at her with a sort of half-horrified pity. He said, "I don't want to drive you from the highlands, and as for marrying Barbara, I don't doubt we shall manage whether you like it or not!"

"Taking her in sin perhaps like her father and that woman——"

"Hold your tongue," he shouted, in a sudden fury. "You're wicked and callous and unchristian. How can you sit there with your hands on that book—hating, slandering. . . . But then, it's always the same, it's people like you, the Bible-thumpers, the righteous, the narrow-minded, who are the real enemies of God." He controlled his anger with an effort. "I told you that I don't want to hurt you and that's true." He stood up. "Major Stanhope, I suggest you think up some new hiding-place for your duty rosters. And I should forget about Joseph. He's gone off without leave and not returned."

Stanhope stared at him in wonder. "You mean, you're not going to report?"

"You won't be hurt by me."



"But——" Stanhope came ambling over with a worried frown, "if you don't report it, how can you clear yourself?"

"I can't." He turned again to Mrs. Stanhope, who was watching him with a peculiar expression of disbelief, as though she were searching for some discreditable motives. "Let the drunken half-native Denny show you a small act of charity."

He stalked out of the room in a blind rage, ignoring Barbara's cry, and the old lady's cynical laugh, but he had only taken a few steps towards the sunlight, when he saw Uncle Angus crawling up the steps.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

### I

FROM THE TELEPHONE BY THE WINDOW he took in the whole scene: Mrs. Stanhope ripping down the blood-stained shirt, the scrawny chest crossed with wounds; Barbara standing tightly, on the verge of fainting, with the white bowl and a sponge in her hands; Stanhope waiting miserably beyond the table.

"Hallo!" He was through at last. "This is Denny—D.C. Denny speaking from the Stanhope farm. I want help up here quickly, a patrol ambushed—as far as I can make out, down the old road—platoon strength at least with some trackers—only hurry. McBrayne is here wounded—pretty bad. Attacked by a big force—carefully planned. I don't know—not really fit to talk. So far as I can make out the patrol scattered—de Groot, Viljoen"—he couldn't help looking at the old lady—"and young Ian Stanhope."

As he put down the receiver he saw the look of insane hatred she cast at her husband, and he heard her threaten, "If anything has happened to my boy . . . !"

"Don't upset yourself, Jessie. He'll be all right." Noticing with relief that Denny had made his call, Stanhope took up his belt and holster. "I'll go out with Denny."

The old lady stood up. "I'm coming with you."

"But, Jessie!"

"You don't think I can stay here with my boy in danger!"

"Well, who's going to look after Angus?"

"The girl can stay."

"No, Mother." Barbara had already taken her revolver from the table. She stood beside Denny. "We'll go together."

Denny put his hand on her shoulder. "You can't. You don't know what we may find. You must stay here."

"I'm coming with you."

Uncle Angus drew himself up on the couch and shouted irascibly, "For heaven's sake don't stand there blethering. Clear out—the lot of ye. Go and find the boy."

"Will you be all right?"

He gave an ancient toothless grin. "Upstairs in my room—behind the cupboard,—ye'll find a bottle of whisky. I'll be all right."

When Denny came down the steps into the cruel sunlight, Mrs. Stanhope was already two or three hundred yards along the hill with her husband following uncertainly behind. Leaning heavily on her stick she moved with utter determination through the tearing briars and thorns and low bushes that covered the scrub land. In a few minutes she was out of sight.

Denny turned quickly to Barbara, "If you still want to come——"

"Of course."

"We'll collect my car—over the hill. If we drive down the old road we may pick him up."

They ran over the short grass, disturbing the cattle to a lumbering trot, frightening a duik-duik from a hollow. The shadows had moved in the hour or more since he had left his car, and now the windscreen was glinting in the sun. When he flung into the driver's seat, the steering wheel was almost too hot to touch. He started the engine, and almost with the same movement, put the car into gear. They jolted up the hill, over the rough stony track, and then, finding the old road, started slowly down towards the forest.

2

Mrs. Stanhope was some way ahead of her husband as they crossed the scrub land and she had lost him altogether before she reached the trees. She plunged into the twilight without hesitation. There was danger here in every bush

and behind every tree, but she could feel nothing except the intense desire to find her son. A leopard moved through the undergrowth and some guinea-fowl scattered to safety. The wind which was only a pleasant movement in the open was as sinister as a dirge beneath the trees. She went blindly on, losing all sense of direction except that she knew she must keep going downhill. The forest had covered and enclosed her. Only fitfully could the sun pierce the foliage. When she stopped she could hear nothing except the wind and the mysterious crackling of the undergrowth. On and on and on. She started to call, "Ian! Ian, my baby!" She was almost hysterical with anxiety.

She came suddenly on a rifle, a regulation, army-pattern .303. There were signs that a skirmish had taken place: scattered footprints in the earth, bushes trodden flat. She followed the signs with dreadful anticipation. There was a forest path wide enough for men to ride along and she saw at the edge of a clearing a horse lying dead between the bushes. It was a bay gelding: Ian's horse.

His body was another twenty yards on. Apparently he had run that distance after his horse had been shot, and he lay in the shadow of the bushes, without a mark on him except the stain, like a red badge of courage, on his chest.

As Mrs. Stanhope knelt beside him the safety fuse of sanity burnt out and she began to chide him gently for the trouble he had caused. With his head cradled on her knees she caressed his face, his forehead, his arms. She looked with bewilderment at the blood on her hands, and then she began to laugh softly as she kissed him on the face.

She was still convinced that he was not dead when her husband stumbled on to the path. He came along half-laughing, half-weeping, with relief when he saw that she was smiling. He was too far away, and the light was not good enough, for him to see her eyes.

"You've found him? He's all right?" He trotted clumsily into the clearing, gasping, coughing with exhaustion, "I told you, Jessie. I told you."

He was half-way across the clearing before his expression changed. The slack mouth hung open, the eyes widened with fear. "Jessie! What in heaven's name! Jessie! What are you going to do?" He stumbled conveniently a few steps towards her before she shot him dead.

Silence settled on the forest again as she sat holding her child. The sun moved across the clearing, and she had to shift her position to keep his head in shadow. Somewhere in the valley a car was climbing. Its engine note rose and echoed against the hill. Nearer and nearer: the old road could only be a few hundred yards away. Then, disconcertingly, it stopped.

She rested back, dismissing it from her thoughts. Her tongue clucked with concern as she felt Ian's face growing cold. There was plenty of sunlight still. She held him close to her old body as she crooned comfort into deaf ears.

Round the clearing the shadows were moving—tree shadows, silhouetted bushes: and the deeper menace of resurgent Africa.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THEY DROVE ALMOST TO THE VALLEY ROAD before they knew they must turn back. If Ian had escaped on horseback he could hardly have come as far as this; if he were on foot he must still be far up the mountain. Denny turned carefully on the narrow road; in reverse, with the wheels spinning to the dust, forward a yard to the precipice edge.

They were round at last, and, driving up the rough twisting road, he remembered the first time he had made this journey. If he could have foreseen then what lay ahead! A mile farther on was where he had stopped, where Baker had been killed, where he had first seen Barbara. All life had started on this road, and now, somewhere in the edging forest, a boy might be running from death. He stared achingly into the unrevealing trees, the cedars and podocarpus and giant thorn, but there was no movement beyond the following trail of dust. Beside him Barbara was huddled in grief, her hands clasped unobtrusively in prayer: "Oh, God, let us find him soon."

Climbing to the steeper slopes, swinging round spectacular bends, his whole attention was taken by the road. There wasn't time for careful driving, and repeatedly he felt the wheels riding against the low retaining wall of stones.

They came at last to the clearing. He stopped where he had stopped before, with the high cliff of rock leaning over the road. He climbed out into the dust. "It's no use going on. We'll have to go into the forest—on foot."

"Of course." As she felt his hand helping her from the car, tears broke through restraint. She stumbled, fell against his arm, and stood there with head bent, until the first flood of grief was past.

"Don't cry," he said. "There's still a chance, and look——" He pointed joyfully to his own road, where two

army trucks were just entering the ravine. "They'll be here soon."

"Shall we wait?"

"Yes. There's no point in starting alone."

Without looking at him she asked for the comfort she knew he was too honest to give. "Darling, he will be all right?"

"I don't know. If he's alive——"

"If he's alive!" she broke in hysterically. "How can we stand here like this!"

He said firmly, "If he's alive the troops will find him. In a few minutes they'll be here. We must be patient."

"Patient!" Tears of wretchedness were running down her face. "I've felt all along that something would happen. We've been too happy, too wickedly happy, to escape some dreadful punishment. But I never thought—how could I know it would happen like this?"

He asked roughly, "What are you talking about?"

"Loving you as I have, without restraint, I've known all along we were doomed."

"Listen!" He grasped her by both arms, held her so fiercely that she was startled into submission. "Don't talk to me about wickedness. In the last few months, since I met you, I've seen enough to last me a lifetime—hatred, prejudice, the most cruel slander. There's nothing too bad for these—these demi-gods! Tolerance means nothing to them—no more than justice. I tell you our love, given and taken without condition, is the most honest emotion I've known. We've nothing to be ashamed of."

He released her arms, embarrassed at his violence, but before he could feel her reaction he was frozen by a mad scream from the hillside. It rose chillingly, trembled on the still air, and then died slowly down until it was lost in the green and savage jungle.